



Promoting open and equal access to justice for all.

Harris County Law Library

Five Years of Progress 2013-2017



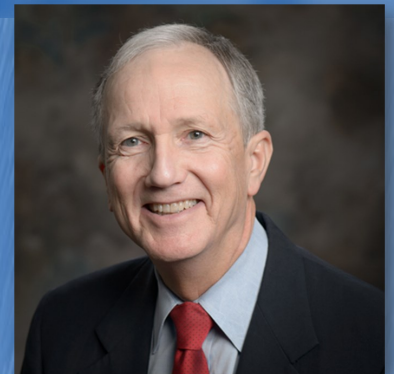
The Harris County Law Library is
part of the Office of Vince Ryan,
Harris County Attorney.

Five Years of Progress 2013-2017

The Harris County Law Library relocated to the first floor of Congress Plaza on January 1, 2013. This report records the progress made in service to the citizens of Harris County in the last five years, from doubling traffic through outreach and increasing use of digital resources by more than 400% to building a robust public education program and strengthening ties in the community.



A Message from **Vince Ryan** Harris County Attorney



Our Office is pleased to report on the progress of the Harris County Law Library over the last five years. Since Commissioners Court approved our plan to make the Law Library part of our Office, we have worked to ensure it is a destination for all residents of Harris County who want to find and read the law that governs them and participate in their government. Building on the successes of recent years, our Office will continue the work of connecting the people with their legal resources at the Harris County Law Library.

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*Please address questions, comments, and concerns related to this report to
Joseph D. Lawson, Deputy Director, Harris County Law Library, at lawlibrary@cao.hctx.net
Photos on front cover by Joe Strange.*

Mission

PROMOTING OPEN AND EQUAL
ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL



HARRIS COUNTY LAW LIBRARY

The Harris County Law Library is a public library that serves the legal information needs of self-represented litigants, legal professionals, the judiciary, and county and other governmental officials. Public access to legal information is a critical component of open and equal access to the justice system. The Harris County Law Library's mission is to provide all of its patrons access to relevant, current, accurate, and practical legal information in the most appropriate and cost-effective formats possible and to provide educational opportunities designed to enhance patrons' understanding of legal information and how it is accessed.



A Message from Mariann Sears, Director, Harris County Law Library

We are honored to present this report to the citizens and leadership of Harris County. In the last five years, the Harris County Law Library has made great strides in service to our patrons. From expanding our digital collection to meet the needs of 21st century researchers to partnering with Houston Volunteer Lawyers to bring legal assistance to the most vulnerable among us, the Law Library seeks to promote open and equal access to justice for all.

Fulfilling our Mission



Meet Jane

Jane is a busy solo attorney whose mobile practice keeps overhead low, but she occasionally needs resources outside her database plan and would like training on the newest research tools. With free access to Westlaw, Lexis Advance, O'Connor's Online, free WiFi, and free CLE, Jane can find the resources she needs to represent her clients at the Harris County Law Library.



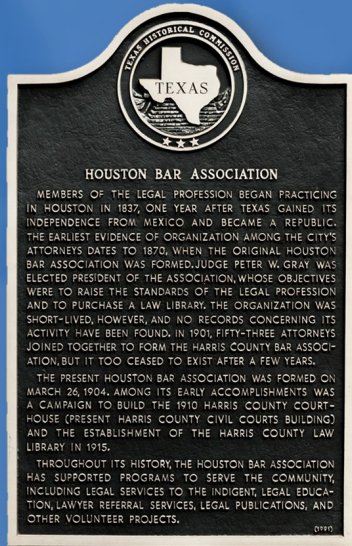
Meet John

John is an entrepreneur who is building his company. Like many small-business owners, John's fluctuating cash flow prevents him from keeping an attorney on retainer, but he knows he needs legal information. John can visit the Harris County Law Library where friendly law librarians can help him find self-help resources and connect him with community resources and attorney referral services when he needs legal advice.



History

Serving the Harris County legal community since 1915.

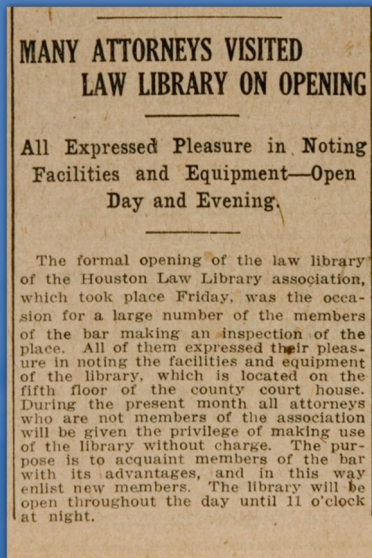
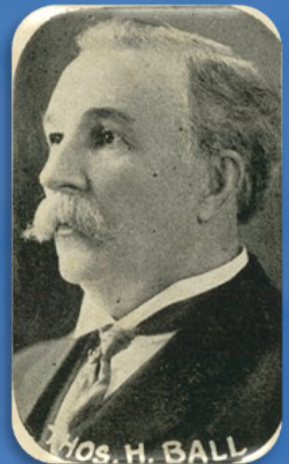
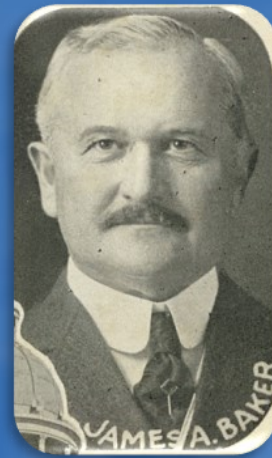


1870 Houston Bar Association Formed to Build A Law Library for Area Lawyers

As early as 1870, Houston lawyers saw the need for a law library. Judge Peter W. Gray, first president of the Houston Bar Association and founder of the firm that would later become Baker Botts, made the issue of establishing a law library a top priority. Difficulties with funding and acquiring sufficient materials delayed the project, but HBA support continued until the Harris County Law Library was later established in 1915. Today, a plaque commemorating the genesis of the Houston Bar Association and Harris County Law Library stands outside the West entrance of the historical 1910 Courthouse.

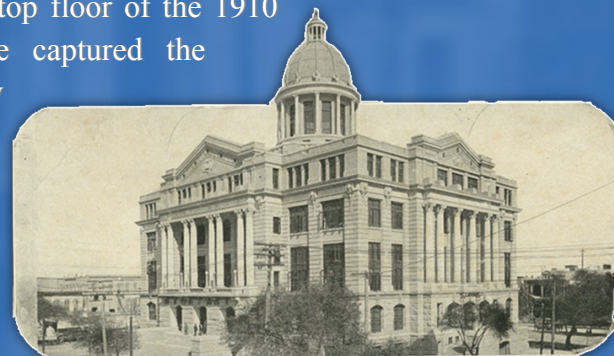
1913 Lawyers Library Association

On March 6, 1913, seven prominent members of Houston's bench and bar incorporated the Lawyers Library Association to raise money for a law library. Founders included James A. Baker and Congressman Thomas Ball.



1915 The Grand Opening

On October 1, 1915, the Harris County Law Library officially opened on the top floor of the 1910 Courthouse. A *Houston Post* article captured the excitement of the local bar. The new law library allowed only dues-paying members to use the collection, but extended promotional membership to all local bar members during the month following the grand opening.



1941 **Becoming a Public Institution**

On September 15, 1941, the Harris County Commissioners Court adopted rules for the maintenance of the Harris County Law Library, effectively converting the library from a subscribers' library into a public institution. In 1943, the Commissioners vested oversight of the Law Library in the Houston Bar Association Law Library Committee.

1986 **Enter the Digital Age**

In 1986, the Harris County Law Library joined the digital revolution in legal research and became one of the first public law libraries to offer access to Westlaw's W.A.L.T. (a.k.a. West Automated Legal Terminal).



Photo of WALT terminal used with permission of Thomson Reuters.



2011 **Joining the County Attorney's Office**

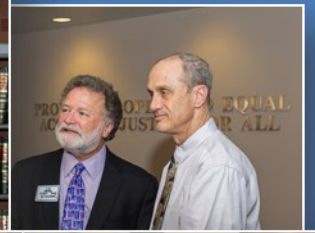
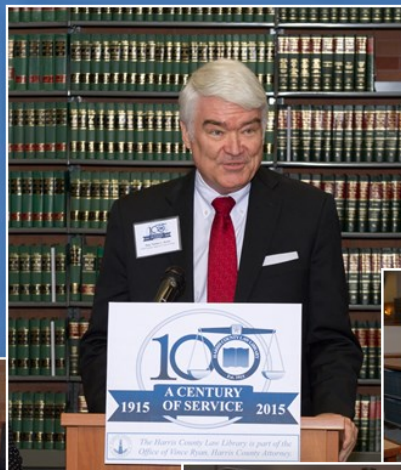
Harris County Commissioners Court made the Law Library a part of the Office of Vince Ryan, Harris County Attorney, making the progress detailed in this report possible.



Celebrating a Century of Service

2015

On October 1, 2015, the Law Library welcomed more than 300 members of the local bench and bar to celebrate our century of service with a reception and keynote address on the importance of law libraries and access to justice from Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht of the Supreme Court of Texas.

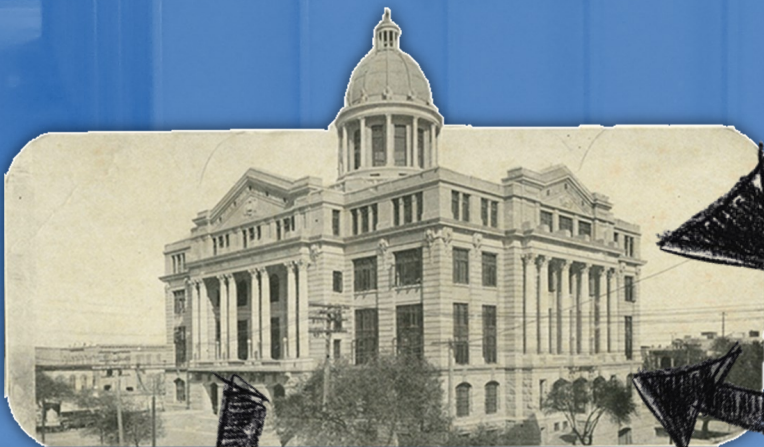


Photos by Joe Strange.

Relocation

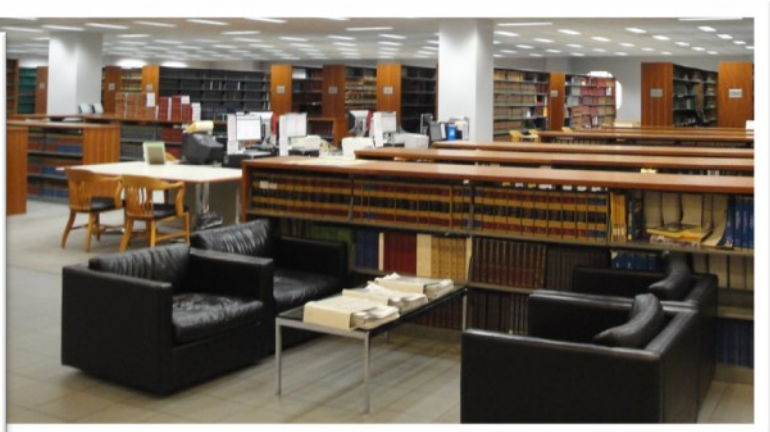
Four locations
in 100 years

The Harris County Law Library opened its doors on October 1, 1915, on the top floor of the historic 1910 Courthouse in downtown Houston. Since then, it has relocated three times, but has remained at the intersection of Congress and Fannin Streets for more than 100 years.



*Original
Location
in 1915*

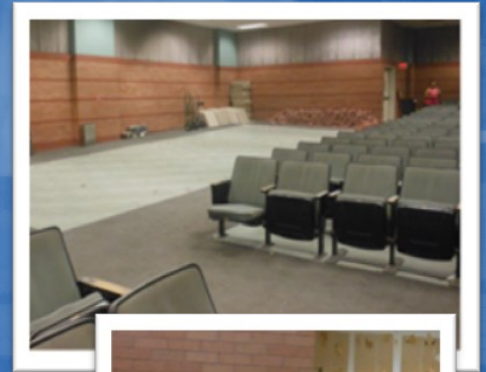
*Relocated to 1st
floor in 1956*



*Moved to Congress
Plaza in 1986*

Preparing for the 2013 Move

Law Library staff worked diligently to prepare the collection for a smaller, but more accessible, space while crews led by the County Engineer made extensive renovations to Congress Plaza's first floor, even pouring new concrete to convert the old jury assembly room into a welcoming space uniquely suited to law library operations. The Harris County Attorney's Office incorporated costs into its allocated budget.



Grand Opening 2013

Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan, Law Library Staff, and members of the Houston Bar Association Law Library Committee welcomed elected officials, local attorneys, and the public to the newly renovated space.



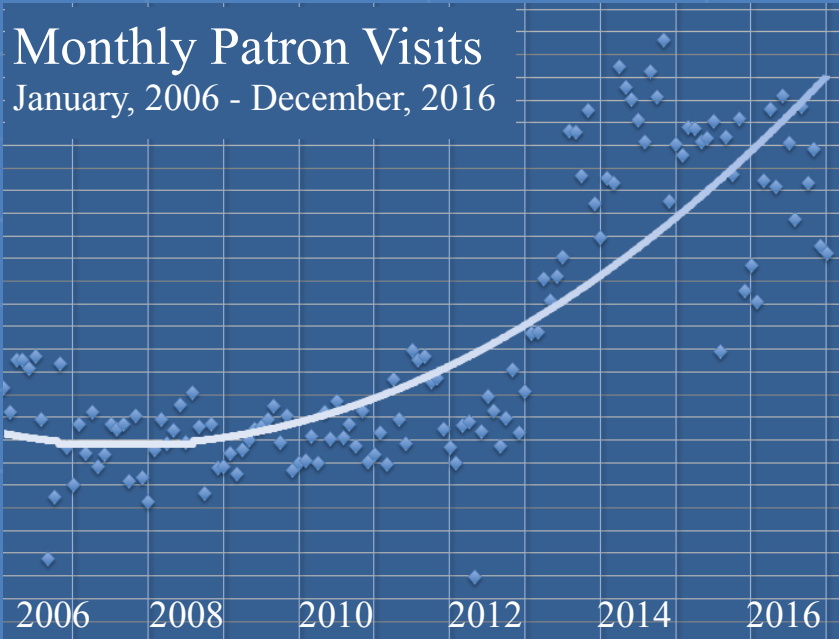
Value

Increasing value for the citizens of Harris County has been our #1 goal in the last five years.

Outreach + Relocation = Double the Traffic

Between 2006 and 2016, law library traffic doubled from an average of 2,500 visits per month to 5,000. Beginning in 2012, law library staff under new leadership and with the support of the Harris County Attorney's Office, increased outreach efforts to local bar associations, legal aid, community organizations, and the public. Relocation to the first floor of Congress Plaza also increased visibility and access with patrons in the courthouse complex.

Monthly Patron Visits
January, 2006 - December, 2016



Cost per Patron

2009

\$52.37



2016

\$24.01

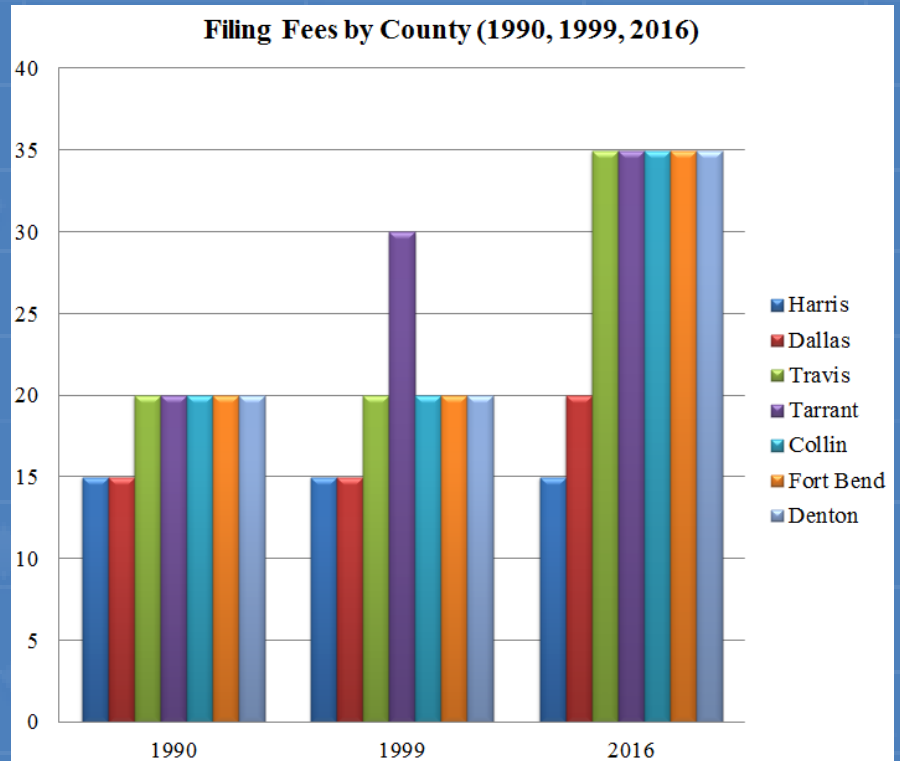
Cost Per Patron

Cut By More Than Half

Substantial increases in law library use coupled with no changes in the Law Library Fund filing fee since 1990 have reduced the law library's cost per patron from a high of \$52.37 in 2009 to just \$24.01 in 2016.

Lowest Law Library Fee in Texas & Unchanged for 27+ Years

County law libraries in Texas are not funded by taxes, but by a fee on civil filings. The Law Library operates on the lowest amount charged in Texas and has expanded services for the citizens of Harris County in the last five years while keeping costs low.



Increased Service Without Increased Cost

Law librarians offer assistance with legal research questions at the reference desk and by phone. Between 2013 and 2017, they answered more than 90,000 questions and

More than
90,000
questions answered
2013-2017

the average number of questions answered per month increased from just over 900 in 2013 to 1,600 in 2017.

Average Questions Answered per Month

? 935 in 2013 ? 1,600 in 2017

Technology

A leader statewide in digital access.



Photo by Joe Strange.

A Digital Workspace Steps from the Courthouse

The Law Library is a statewide leader in providing access to digital legal research resources. Following relocation, the Law Library now offers a dedicated digital research

space with 25 public access terminals. Each computer has the tools needed for modern legal work, including Microsoft Word and Excel, Adobe Reader, and Internet access.

O'CONNOR'S ONLINE

The First to Offer O'Connor's Online For All

Texas attorneys know O'Connor's. Even with advancements in technology, attorneys still carry print copies of O'Connor's resources to Harris County courthouses. When O'Connor's released its database in 2014, we knew it was a game changer and we began working with the publisher to create a public access version that we could offer to all in the Law Library. On March 30, 2015, we opened access on all 25 computers in our digital research space. The model established in Harris County was then used to make O'Connor's Online available in public law libraries throughout Texas.

Strategic Coverage

The Law Library strategically subscribes to leading databases to ensure access to unique content and to help other government agencies cut costs. For example, the Internal Operating Procedures for the 1st and 14th Courts of Appeals indicate that they only subscribe to Westlaw and use the Law Library to access other databases.

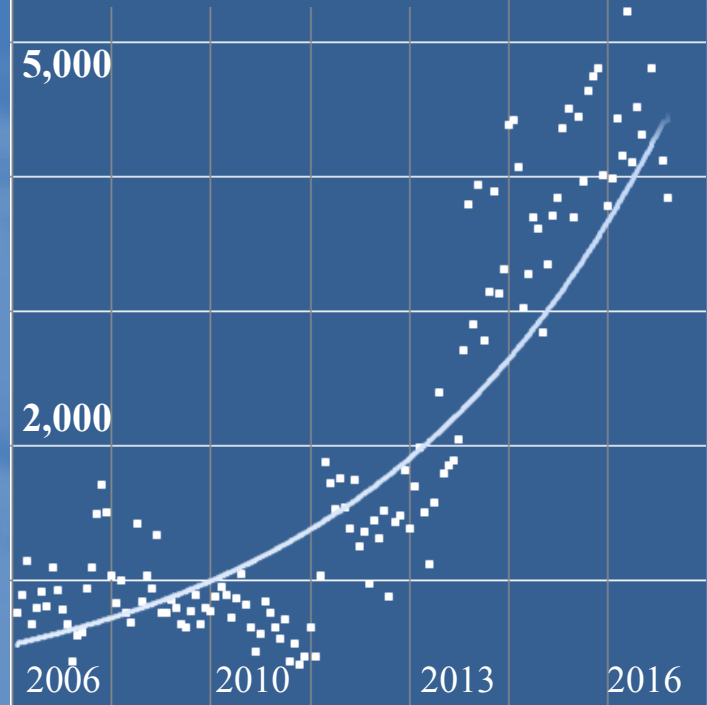
Increasing Digital Access | Reducing Cost



The Law Library provides free access

to Westlaw, a leading legal research database used extensively by Harris County courts as well as the worldwide legal community. Solo and small firm practitioners and members of the public who do not have access can visit the

Westlaw Transactions per month



Westlaw Cost per transaction

2010
\$8.83



2016
\$1.37

Law Library to use the database on one of five research terminals, receive assistance with their research from our well-trained staff, and attend classes presented by Westlaw representatives. In the last five years, the Law

Library has encouraged use of this digital resource through outreach and education, and use has increased by more than 400%, all while keeping costs low by negotiating reasonable contracts with vendors and managing our budget.



Education

Supporting Legal Research Education Across the Region

Legal Research Instruction

Our law librarians have substantial expertise in the field of legal research. We assist patrons with complicated legal research questions at the reference desk tens of thousands of times each year, providing informal instruction to empower our patron's research.



We provide formal instruction through CLEs at our facility and online, and speaking engagements for community groups. For example, our deputy director regularly leads a legal research and citation class for paralegals and legal assistants as part of Houston Area Legal Professionals continuing education program.



Photo by Joe Strange.

Library Tours

In the last five years, the Law Library has offered over 60 instructional tours to support local education. Paralegal students from Rice and Houston and Alvin Community Colleges, and Criminal Procedure students from UH-Downtown tour our facility each year as part of their legal research curriculum. We also host legal technology classes from HCC, area high school and elementary students, and community groups.



Photos by Joe Strange.



Legal Tech Institute

Law and tech intersect at the Harris County Law Library



www.harriscountylawlibrary.org/tech

The Law Library launched its Legal Tech Institute in October, 2016, to provide training opportunities on the technology used for modern legal work. Programs range from practical to cutting edge to provide opportunities at all skill levels. Patrons can sign up to attend a session in person or view recorded programs on-demand online. Each program, including on-demand recordings, is accredited by the State Bar of Texas for attorney continuing legal education.

The Ethics of
Cloud Computing
Using Cloud Storage and
Applications in Your Practice

Legal
Practice
Technology

EXCEL
ESSENTIALS
for the Practice of Law

FINDING &
FORMATTING
LEGAL FORMS

Hands-on
Legal Tech
Training

The Robot Lawyer
Esq.
Artificial Intelligence in the Practice of Law

Exhibits: In-house, Online & on the Road



Law Library staff create museum-quality exhibits featuring rare books, artifacts, and other items from the collection to educate on topics ranging from *Magna Carta* to Space Law. Exhibits appear in our lobby and on our website as digital exhibits. We also hit the road with custom displays for programs held outside the library.

Photos by Joe Strange.

Community

Reaching out to
Harris County
and beyond

The Harris County Law Library has been a part of the local legal community for over 100 years. In the last five years, we have worked to strengthen those ties and to reach the greater community of Harris County, statewide, and beyond.



Local Legal Community

We work extensively with the Houston Bar Association to ensure our resources and services meet the needs of the 11,000+ HBA members.

Speaker Services

We offer speakers services to bar, librarian, and community groups across the Houston metro area.



Spotlighting Good

And we support the good works of our local bar, such as the HBA's Pro Bono for Veterans.



Harvey Recovery Resources

When we and our neighbors experienced the worst flood event in Houston's history, our staff assembled a collection of online resources to help our community recover even before we could reopen our facility.



Great Day Houston

On November 4, 2015, our Deputy Director Joe Lawson appeared on KHOU's Great Day Houston with Debra Duncan to discuss Law Library services. Law librarians are not well-known as on-air talent, but the chance to connect with so many Houstonians with the valuable, free resources available at the Law Library could not be missed.

Promoting Pro Bono

Law Library leadership contributes expertise to local and state pro bono efforts by serving on advisory boards, such as the TexasLawHelp.org advisory board, and as panelists, such as Law Library Director Mariann Sears speaking at the 10th Annual Houston Pro Bono Network Luncheon.



Supporting Law Libraries

Our law librarians frequently serve in leadership roles, present programs, and publish articles for our national and local law librarian associations.

Access

Promoting open and equal access to justice for all

Who We Serve

Only about 10% of our patrons are attorneys and judges.



Nearly 90% are self-represented litigants, small business owners, and other members of the public.



20%

Mind the (Justice) Gap

The Texas Commission to Expand Civil Legal Services has reported[‡] that a majority of low and moderate-income Texans do not receive the legal help they need and up to 80% of poor litigants are unrepresented in civil legal matters.

[‡]Report of the Texas Access to Justice Commission (Dec. 6, 2016), available at <http://www.txcourts.gov/organizations/policy-funding/texas-commission-to-expand-civil-legal-services/>

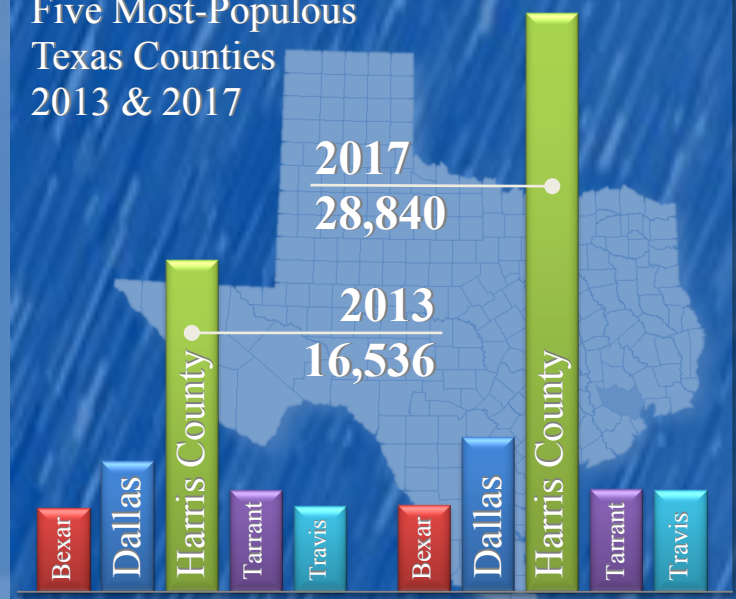


Harris County Leads Texas in Self-representation

From 2013 to 2017[†], Harris County outpaced all other Texas counties in the number of civil and family cases filed by self-represented litigants. In 2017, Harris County saw 28,840 such filings, while Dallas County had 7,711 and other counties far fewer.

Self-represented Civil Filings

Five Most-Populous Texas Counties
2013 & 2017

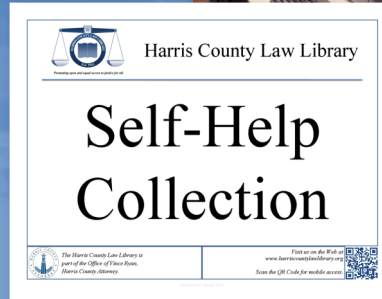
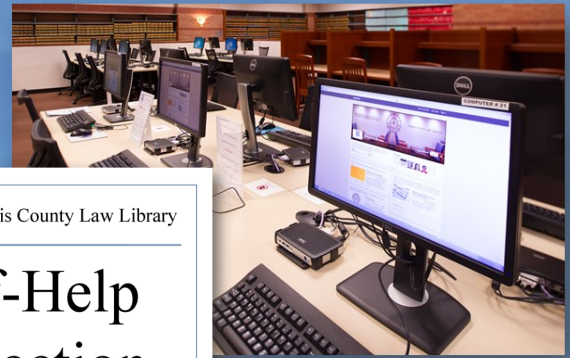


[†]Statistics retrieved from Texas Office of Court Administration Court Activity Reporting and Directory System on February 28, 2018.

Access to Justice Through Access to Information

For many citizens of Harris County, the Law Library is the only source of information they need to access justice. Whether it's the 20% of low-income Houstonians who have no Internet access or those who have access on a smartphone only, many lack the digital

access and literacy they need to use important self-help resources, including TexasLawHelp.org. Our law librarians help these individuals navigate a wide range of print and digital resources and our director and deputy director have served on the TexasLawHelp.org Advisory Board to help ensure access to needed information for all.



Houston Volunteer Lawyers Information Booth



Photo by Joe Strange.

Many self-represented litigants need to speak with a lawyer, but few have access. Beginning in September, 2016, low-income Houstonians gained access at the Law Library with the new Houston Volunteer Lawyers information booth. Staff attorneys and volunteers from law schools and law firms provide legal information on a walk-in basis. Leadership

from the Law Library, Harris County Attorney's Office, Houston Bar Association, and Houston Volunteer Lawyers continue to work to increase access and, in March, 2018, access doubled as booth hours expanded to Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Self-Help Legal Aid Clinics

Working with partners at Houston Volunteer Lawyers, the Law Library offers legal aid clinics. Our staff coordinates facilities and technology for the volunteer lawyers who help dozens each quarter. When Hurricane Harvey damaged our lower-level conference center, the Law Library opened its research space to ensure this valuable service continued for the most vulnerable among us.



Recognition

A recognized leader
in Harris County
and nationwide

Vince Ryan Claims National Award

Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan was named the 2016 Law Library Advocate of the Year by the Government Law Libraries section of the American Association of Law Libraries for his leadership in relocating the Harris County Law Library and making library resources and services more accessible for all.



Photo courtesy of AALL.

Law Library Nationally Recognized for Outreach

Law Library staff received back-to-back Excellence in Marketing Awards from the American Association of Law Libraries in 2016 and 2017 for our outreach efforts.

Deputy Director Earns Leadership Award

The American Association of Law Libraries awarded Law Library Deputy Director Joe Lawson its prestigious Emerging Leader award in 2017 at the association's 110th Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas.



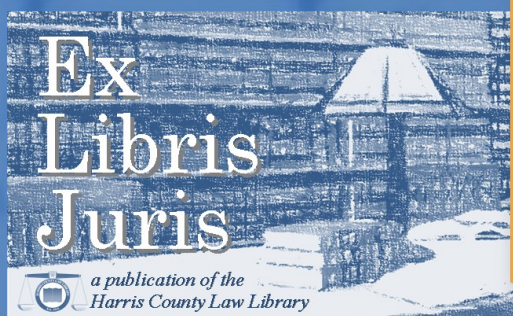
Photo courtesy of AALL.

Commissioners Court Designates October 1, 2015 Harris County Law Library Day for Centennial

Harris County Commissioners recognized the Law Library for its century of continued service to the local legal community and citizens of Harris County with a resolution designating October 1, 2015—the 100th anniversary of the Law Library’s grand opening—as “Harris County Law Library Day.”



Photo by Joe Strange.



State Bar Features Law Library Blog

Texas Bar Today from the State Bar of Texas featured blog posts

written by our law librarians and published on our blog *Ex Libris Juris* eight times in 2017 in its weekly listing of the top 10 posts from law blogs across the state.

Law Library Awarded Substantial Grant for Legal Tech Training Program

The Texas Bar Foundation awarded a \$23,000 grant to the Law Library in support of our Hands-on Legal Tech Training program. The generous grant funded the purchase of training laptops and peripherals patrons can use to gain experience using legal technology during sessions led by our law librarians. Learn more about the program at www.harriscountylawlibrary.org/tech

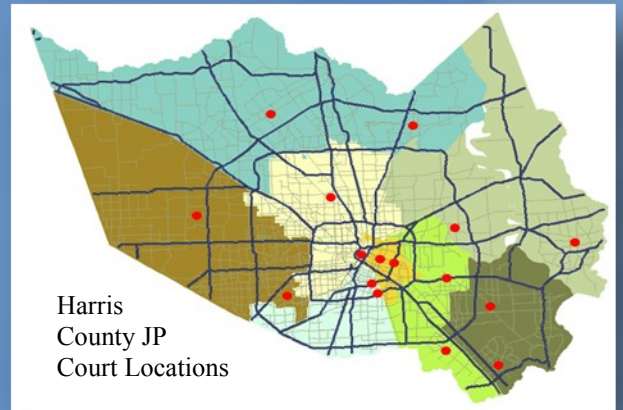


Forward

Looking forward to the next five years.

Expanding Services to All Precincts

The Law Library is currently located at its patrons' greatest source of need - the downtown courthouse complex. Legal information is important for JP courts, public libraries, colleges, and small businesses in all precincts in Harris County. We are exploring possibilities to offer the expert assistance of our reference librarians and educational opportunities without building additional facilities by using virtual reference, chat, and screen-sharing technologies.



Video and Virtual Reality

Imagine if attorneys and self-represented litigants could experience the Harris County courtroom before going to court. We're working on it.

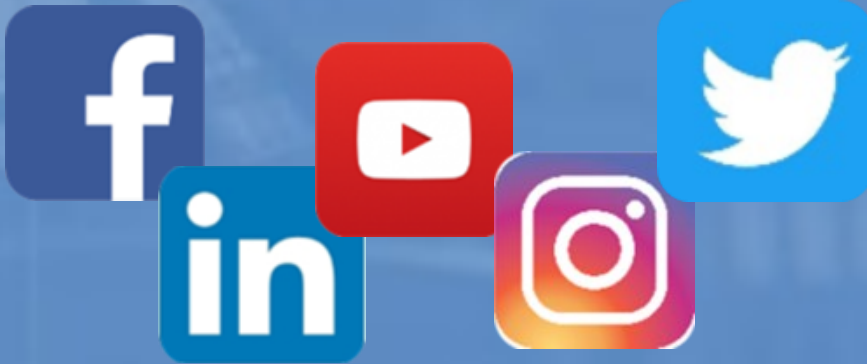


Photo of astronaut with virtual reality headset was created by NASA and is available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Head-mounted_display_and_wired_gloves,_Ames_Research_Center.jpg

Photo of courtroom was created by Harris County Courts and is available at <http://www.ccl.hctx.net/Courtroom.htm>

Further Reading

Connect with us to keep up to date with the Law Library's progress in the next five years.



Get Social

Connect with us on most major social media platforms.

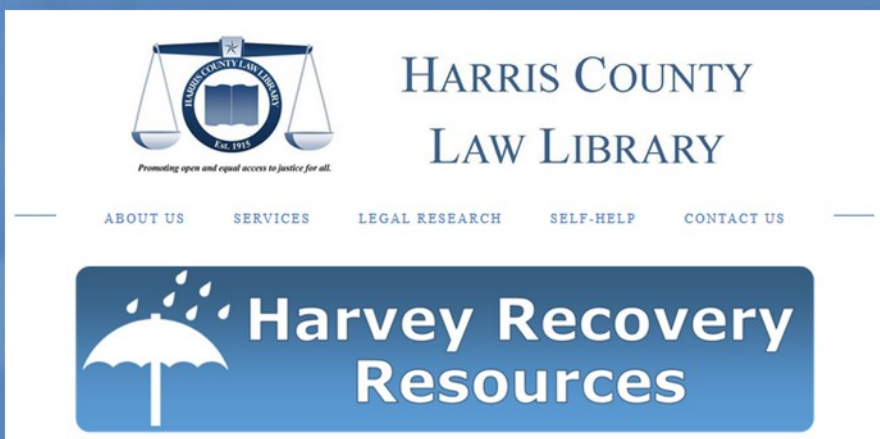
Ex Libris Juris

Read about new resources and services, upcoming events, and legal technology on our blog.



Visit Our Website

For information on upcoming events, legal research and self-help resources, and more, visit:



www.harriscountylawlibrary.org

Connect with Us

In Person



Location

Harris County Law Library
Congress Plaza, 1st Floor
1019 Congress Street
Houston, Texas 77002

Hours

Monday - Friday
8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Phone

713-755-5183

Online

www.harriscountylawlibrary.org

Social



@HCLawLibrary



[Facebook.com/harriscountylawlibrary](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountylawlibrary)



[Linkedin.com/company/harris-county-law-library](https://www.linkedin.com/company/harris-county-law-library)



[YouTube.com/c/HarrisCountyLawLibrary](https://www.youtube.com/c/HarrisCountyLawLibrary)



[Instagram.com/harriscountylawlibrary](https://www.instagram.com/harriscountylawlibrary)