



More Than Books:

The Jefferson County Public Law Library Evolves with the Times

Chief Circuit Judge Eric Haner

The role of a law library has changed considerably as legal research has moved from books and bound volumes to online databases and digital resources. But for the Jefferson County Public Law Library, the mission remains much the same: providing access to knowledge and information to the community in support of justice and respect for the law.

Located in Louisville's Old Jail Building at 6th and Jefferson Streets, the Jefferson County Public Law Library serves both the legal community and the public. Under the direction of Amy Hilliard, who became director in 2021, the library has expanded its services while finding new ways to meet the needs of today's lawyers and litigants.

I recently spoke with Hilliard about the library's mission, its services, the new mock courtroom and the future of the law library.

Q: What is the mission of the Jefferson County Public Law Library?

A: The mission of the Jefferson County Public Law Library (JCPLL) is to provide the community with a current collection of legal reference materials based upon the belief that access to knowledge and information is essential to the promotion of justice and respect for the law.

Q: How has the library changed as legal research has moved from books to digital resources?

A: We have reduced the number of print subscriptions that we keep current while simultaneously increasing the number of online resources to which we subscribe. Importantly, we keep all Kentucky-related materials in-house and up to date. Our Westlaw subscription database is expansive and includes Form Finder, all state and federal case law, access to legal journals, national and international codes and other resources too numerous to mention. Our Lexis subscription adds access to Shepard's, UK/CLE materials and resources such as Bender's Forms of Discovery.

Q: What services does the library offer to lawyers and other legal professionals?

A: For a \$75 annual membership fee we offer checkout privileges of most printed materials, access to Westlaw and Lexis, notary services, email document delivery, use of the conference rooms and the mock courtroom, as well as reduced printing fees. For those attorneys who do not wish to purchase membership, we offer these services for a small fee. I must say that \$75 per year is probably one of the best deals available nowadays when it comes to "bang for the buck."

Q: How can members of the public access the library, and what resources or assistance are available to them?

A: JCPLL is open 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. We offer access to research with our print resources, including many materials from NOLO, which publishes legal materials geared towards the non-lawyer. We provide court packets for common legal actions that explain the court processes. This includes filing for sole custody, starting a probate action or dispensing with administration, divorce actions and expungements. We have a monthly Library Lunch Series open to all community members at which we feature a local author and provide lunch for attendees.



Judge Hugh Smith Haynie (ret.)

HAYNIE & REYNOLDS

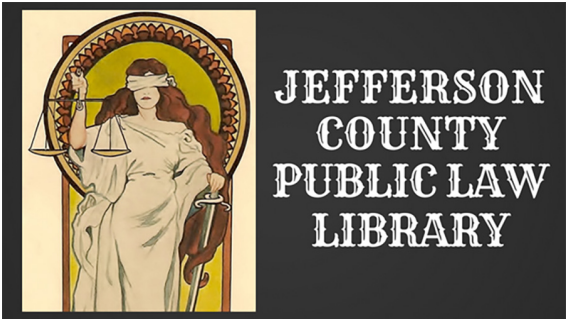
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We are most proud of our Legal Help Center, which was started in 2024 as a joint project between the Kentucky Access to Justice Commission, the Office of the Circuit Court Clerk and the local judiciary. Every Tuesday, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., local attorneys volunteer their time to assist the public with civil legal actions. Attorneys do not represent these patrons but offer their expertise to help them navigate the courts and advocate for themselves. We are consistently booked up two weeks in advance and must have patrons check back for openings. The goal of this program is to help *pro se* litigants make the correct filings for their situations, thus streamlining the process for them, the clerks and the judges alike.

Our Friends of JCPLL group has also obtained grants from Metro Council, the Kentucky Bar Foundation and the Louisville Bar Foundation to support our Fresh Start Expungement program. This program covers all costs for eligible participants, including an attorney to handle all filings, for those looking to clear their criminal record. We don't have an active grant at the moment, but we are working to secure one soon.

Q: I understand that the library recently invested in a new mock courtroom. Can you tell us more about it?

A: This goes back to the evolving mission of the library. When I became director in 2021, we were attempting to devise how best to serve the public and the legal community moving forward in this new era. For the public, we implemented the Legal Help Center, and for the legal community we felt that access to a courtroom could be helpful, especially for those in solo practice or those in small firms.

Q: How can lawyers and others in the legal community access and use the mock courtroom?

A: Our mock courtroom is available for reservation during library business hours and, in special circumstances, can be scheduled outside of those hours. Just call the library to reserve the room. The rental fee for non-members is \$60 per hour.

Q: What does the mock courtroom offer that lawyers cannot get from simply preparing in an office?

A: Our courtroom is modeled after the courtrooms in the local Hall of Justice and Judicial Center and contains a fully functional JAVS system. Attorneys can use the room to prep witnesses, practice their openings and closings, and record it all to play back and determine where changes need to be made.

Q: How has the mock courtroom been received by the legal community?

A: The Commonwealth Attorney's Office uses our courtroom for staff training, and the courtroom has been used by local high schools for mock trials. We've had some members use it to prep witnesses and practice trials. A federal agency has used it two years in a row for training. It's even been used to shoot a commercial, a short film and interviews with attorneys for TV shows and podcasts, which are uses that we never even considered.

Q: How can the legal community help ensure the law library remains a strong resource for future generations?

A: Visit the library and see what we have to offer. Consider getting membership or donating to support us. Share this information and refer others. Volunteer with the Legal Help Center and encourage others to do so. Support our programs by attending our Library Lunch Series and our annual Law Day in the Park. JCPLL is truly a gem hidden in plain sight. The library is centrally located in the Old Jail Building, close to the courthouses. Staff is friendly and will go the extra mile to find what you need. Times are changing, and the law library is working to change with the times to provide relevant services for years to come. And as always, we value your input. If you see how we can offer better services and support, please let us know.

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Chief Judge Eric Haner presides in Division One of the Jefferson Circuit Court, and is the Chief Regional Judge. ■

