

June 2011

Office of the Ohio Public Defender Legal Resource Center

By Lisa Ostrolenk, Legal Resource Center Librarian

Ohio Revised Code §120.04 requires the State Public Defender to maintain a library in the central office of adequate size, considering the needs of the office and the accessibility of other libraries.

The Legal Resource Center is the library of the Office of the Ohio Public Defender, and it serves the staff of the central office; branch and regional offices; county public defender offices; appointed counsel; the private bar; Ohio's prisoners; and all Ohioans. Lisa Ostrolenk is the librarian of the Legal Resource Center and David Daiber is the assistant librarian.

The focus of our collection is criminal law and any materials that help criminal defense attorneys do their job.

The library contains more than 1,000 titles, including books, reporters, digests, seminar materials, periodicals, video and audio cassettes, CD-ROMs, expert witness lists, law review articles, and newspaper clippings.

Every Ohio Public Defender employee has access to computer-assisted legal research databases. The Legal Resource Center supplements its collections and services with the resources of the State Library of Ohio, the Supreme Court of Ohio Law Library, the Ohio Historical Society Archives Library, the Ohio State University Libraries, and Columbus Metropolitan Library.

The Legal Resource Center's main priority is the staff of the Public Defender's office, including branch offices. We provide answers to reference questions; research issues; retrieve case law, articles, and statutes; and provide current awareness services. We are responsible for the ordering and cataloging of new materials, whether print or online.

In addition, the Legal Resource Center maintains an expert witness list. Any attorney engaged in criminal defense in Ohio who needs the services of experts in a case can call us for a list of experts in a particular field. We also supply case law to the law librarians in the state correctional institutions.

One of our favorite aspects of our jobs is that our work is different each day and we never know what we are going to be asked to do. Even though the focus of our office may seem narrow – criminal defense – much of our work moves outside the obvious legal issues and into varied topics, including psychology and psychiatry, drug addiction, family dynamics, forensic sciences, childhood development, and background on clients and witnesses.

Examples of just some of the requests we received during the month of April include:

- Locate articles from the European Journal of Neurology, Journal of Traumatic Stress and Mental Retardation (Thank you, OhioLINK.)
- Figure out what counties two California cities are located in for a mitigation specialist (for a records request)
- Retrieve a Federal Register section

- Search for articles on the use of social media during jury trials for two attorneys writing a post-conviction petition
- Fulfill a request from a correctional institution librarian for a legal template
- Retrieve a newspaper article (not available online) for an attorney regarding his client
- Field a request from a county public defender investigator regarding online services billing information
- Retrieve an obituary or any newspaper articles on a specific person for an investigator working on a trial case
- Find an opinion from the Supreme Court of Ohio Board of Commissioners on Grievances and Discipline
- Find old versions of the Ohio Administrative Code for the Outreach Supervisor, who was working with appointed counsel
- Look for newspaper articles and court opinions on a new client for an attorney
- Search for state surveys on Juvenile Law and Sex Offender Registration for an attorney presenting at a seminar
- Retrieve a docket from the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals for a paralegal
- Search Cincinnati newspapers for articles on crimes for the creation of a new database
- Send appointed counsel/public defenders expert witness lists on Pathology, Shaken Baby Syndrome, Ballistics and Computer Forensics per their individual requests
- Retrieve old Ohio Revised Code sections for a secretary putting together a brief
- Fill a book request for an attorney (Again, thank you, OhioLINK.)
- Look for any articles or information on a forensic scientist regarding his possible use as an expert in a case

As with most libraries in this day and age, our focus is to provide the best materials and services as our costs rise and we have to deal with smaller budgets.