

Md. Legal Aid expanding 'Lawyer in the Library' program to Prince George's Co.

By: Anamika Roy Daily Record Legal Affairs Writer February 12, 2018

Prince George's County residents looking for legal advice will be able to get it from a local library next week with the arrival of Maryland Legal Aid's "Lawyer in the Library" program.

Created in response to civil unrest in Baltimore after Freddie Gray's death, the Lawyer in the Library program puts Maryland Legal Aid attorneys, paralegals, pro bono attorneys, law students and other volunteers in public libraries to give free legal assistance and criminal record expungements to low-income residents.



The program will be offered in the Oxon Hill Branch Library starting Feb. 21.

The first "Lawyer in the Library" clinics were held at the Pennsylvania Avenue branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in west Baltimore, near the epicenter of the 2015 conflict. During that time, the branch was managed by Melanie Townsend Diggs, who is now South Area Manager for the Oxon Hill, Surratts-

Clinton, Accokeek, and Baden Branches in Prince George's County.

"I have firsthand experience with the program and the benefits that it offers. It is truly a life-changing opportunity for those in need of legal services, but who cannot otherwise afford it," Townsend Diggs said.

Maryland Legal Aid also has a full-service office in Landover and works with One-Stop Center in Largo and the Family Justice Center in Upper Marlboro.

"Bringing "Lawyer in the Library" to the Oxon Hill library is a special opportunity for us," said Gusty Taler, chief operating officer for Maryland Legal Aid in a statement. "Being able to offer the "Lawyer in the Library" program in Prince George's County brings our service delivery system to a new level."

Maryland Legal Aid received a \$90,000 grant from the Abell Foundation last year to expand the program in Baltimore. In 2016, the legal services organization got a grant from the Maryland Bar Foundation to buy laptops, printers and other technology.

Using the "Lawyer in the Library" program, Maryland Legal Aid staff and volunteers are able to focus their assistance to address the many issues that members of these communities face that are related to each other, including removing barriers to obtaining affordable housing, employment, subsistence income and child custody.

The program has assisted more than 2,000 Baltimore city residents since 2015, according to Maryland Legal Aid.

The "Lawyer in the Library" program will be available at the Oxon Hill Branch Library from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. one Wednesday a month through July: Feb. 21, April 25, May 16, June 20 and July 25. Future dates will be announced later this year.

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