

## Fiscal Highlights

### **Law Library Self-Help Center - How has it fared? - Gary R. Syphus**

How much does \$275,000 buy? For the Courts Self-Help Center, it buys service for estimated 16,000 patrons statewide.

During the 2012 General Session, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 100, "Law Library Self-Help Center" and appropriated \$275,000 of ongoing funds to help significantly expand the function and service of the self-help center located within the Matheson Courthouse. The funds were for staff, including licensed attorneys, mainly to (1) help assist court patrons to help fill out documents and (2) answer questions regarding court process, law and legal options where applicable. However, the funding was not to be used for legal advice or representation.

The bill met the requirement of needing a performance note because it significantly expanded a service to a new or larger population. In the performance note, the Courts stated that the funding would help assist approximately 16,000 patrons in FY 2013 and preliminary numbers for FY 2014 indicated that they will meet this goal again. The Courts reported that all funds were expended to cover the personnel costs estimated in the note with nominal related current expense.

Assuming the intent of the bill was to help the ever-increasing number of self-represented patrons navigate the Court system and avoid costly delays for Courts due to a single party's inexperience, there is data to indicate that it has been successful. Going forward, now that sufficient time has passed to review the performance data associated with this specific appropriation, the Legislature may evaluate the reported outcomes and determine if they want to make any adjustments - just as they can with any other appropriation.