

Ask a Law Librarian—Frequently Asked Questions



What is the Ask a Law Librarian online reference service?

Ask a Law Librarian is a remote legal reference service that allows the public to contact NYS Court System law library staff and ask legal reference questions. There are three modes of inquiry:

- question submission through a short online form (response emailed)
- text/SMS through your phone (response texted through your phone)
- live, online “chat” reference service (response received onscreen)

Due to the remote nature of the interaction, this service is better suited for brief, factual legal reference questions. If you require more dialog to work through your question, it would be better to contact a [specific law library in your county](#) in person or by phone.

What is the Ask a Law Librarian online “chat” reference service?

Ask a Law Librarian is a live, online “chat” reference service for law library patrons asking legal research questions requiring short and factual answers.

It is real-time (live) communication between two people via computer. Once a session has been initiated, either person can enter text on the keyboard, and the entered text will appear on the other user's monitor. During a session, you can ask a reference question via the library's website, and law library staff will respond back to you in real-time.

When is the Ask a Law Librarian reference chat service available?

Monday through Friday 9:30 AM to 12:00 PM and 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM, excluding NYS holidays, and end-of-December court recess.

Who will I be chatting with?

All staff responding to your questions are trained and experienced law librarians or law library assistants. All staff work for the NYS Unified Court System in law libraries around the state.

What are the guidelines for using the Ask a Law Librarian reference service?

The Ask a Law Librarian reference service is intended to answer brief and factual questions. Please be specific about what information you need when stating your question.

If you have asked a question with a broader scope, it would be better to contact a [specific law library in your county](#) in person or by phone.

Can I ask for or receive legal advice for my situation through this service?

No. The staff responding to you are trained and experienced library staff, not attorneys. They are pleased to provide you with basic legal information of relevance to New York State courts, case law, statutory and regulatory materials from standard legal reference sources.

Our Ask a Law Librarian staff, however, may not provide legal advice, interpret the law, or assist with the processing of specific motions or cases.

How do I use the Ask a Law Librarian reference chat service?

To use the Ask a Law Librarian service, click the Ask a Law Librarian image. You will see the three methods noted above to inquire on the right-hand side of the resulting web page: text/SMS, submit a question and chat with a law librarian. You may submit a question through any of these.

Is there a charge to use the Ask a Law Librarian reference chat service?

No. The Ask a Law Librarian service is entirely free.