Minnesota County Law Library Reorganization Efforts:

Submitted by Sara Galligan February 2012

Minnesota county law librarians formed a “Minnesota Coalition of County Law Libraries” (MCCLL) several years ago. It was modeled on a similar group formed earlier in Maryland. The Minnesota group was largely an effort to form a strong base for advocacy, but it also meets regularly to share information about local county law library events and practices, and it has offered an educational program on county law librarianship. The group also works with the Minnesota State Law Library’s (MSLL) county law library coordinator to help communicate with those counties that are not actively part of the MCCLL. The MSLL county law library coordinator also informs the county law libraries about items of interest at the state court level, attorney general actions or statements that impact law libraries or their policies, and passes along legislative items of concern.

The Minnesota legislature meets on a part-time basis in the first half of the year. During the active session, one member of the MCCLL monitors proposed legislation about county law libraries and informs members about items of concern. In the past, no legislation has proceeded beyond the introductory phase; advocacy efforts have involved phone calls by MCCLL members to legislators (including those sponsoring unfavorable bills) as well as communications with the state court lobbyist.

The state court lobbyist has been sensitive to the budget needs of the state law library. The lobbyist has also been helpful as a point person when questions come up in the legislature about county law libraries. This helps create a communication channel between the state law library and the lobbyist, and when needed, the lobbyist, the state law library, and county law libraries.

In the past, the public law libraries (state and county) have connected with the lobbyist hired by the Minnesota Library Association (MLA). The MLA lobbyist represents mostly school and public libraries. However, if the MCCLL feels that proposed legislation might be harmful to county or court law libraries, it tries to inform the lobbyist so that communications with legislators about county law libraries remains favorable to these public law libraries.

County law librarians may also use members of their county boards for advocacy support, or at least to inform the county board’s lobbyist about pending legislation that may be of concern to county law librarians.

As for strengthening communications and support with the state court, in 2006, the Minnesota State Law Librarian was approached by district court staff about expanding a legal research program in one district for statewide availability. The project involved more cost-effective management of Westlaw services. However, some county law librarians feared county law library services might be negatively impacted in some way, and they were concerned about funding. The problem was resolved by creating a state court task force to study the issue. The final report was beneficial to both court and law library staff for understanding how court self help, county law libraries, and public libraries could collaborate in delivering services to pro se parties without diverting county law library funds to court programs. The report was included in an AALL program several years ago; the link to the report is:
In 2011, the county law libraries were invited to present testimony before the Minnesota Judicial Council (the state court’s governing body) to explain how their programs were meeting the needs of pro se litigants.

The 2006 and 2011 efforts have been helpful in keeping open communications between the state court and county law libraries, and the generally positive support county law librarians obtain from the state court is integral to ongoing support for county law libraries.

In addition to MCCLL, members of AALL have been recruited to develop a strategy to advocate for The Uniform Electronic Legal Material Act (UELMA), a uniform law that, when passed, requires a state government to make its official electronic legal material[s] be: (1) authenticated, by providing a method to determine that it is unaltered; (2) preserved, either in electronic or print form; and (3) accessible, for use by the public on a permanent basis.

UELMA has been approved by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws and the American Bar Association House of Delegates, and it is under consideration in ten states. In the meantime, AALL volunteers conducted a 50-state inventory to determine what materials are currently available online under what circumstances; their report should be released this year. Members of the Minnesota Association of Law Libraries (MALL) performed the Minnesota inventory. MALL members Susan Larson and Brian Huffman, and the Minnesota Revisor, Michele Timmons have been involved in local efforts to get the bill introduced in Minnesota. MALL members may be asked to testify at some point in the future.

Note: The Minnesota State Law Librarian, a constitutional position, has been vacant for 2 ½ years. The reason has to do with strains on the court budget. However, the lengthy absence of leadership at this level is a concern. Local letter-writing efforts to the Chief Justice are underway among the library associations in Minnesota—with an urgent request to move toward recruiting a new state law librarian for Minnesota.