November 4, 2011

RE: ALA and the Future of the FDLP

Dear Colleagues,

ALA has long supported the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) as a major part of the library community’s commitment to assure public access to government information. Recently, there has been vigorous debate, especially among depository librarians, about how best to move forward and address many difficult programmatic and policy issues about the future of the FDLP. I, and others, have recently observed this renewed debate and believe that these discussions indicate a need for ALA to establish a process for broad interaction leading to common ground within ALA on the issues being debated.

The most recent debate has been generated by two proposals made to the Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Superintendent of Documents (SuDoc) by some regional depository libraries requesting certain specific changes in the way they are organized and share regional depository library duties. (Proposals: ASERL and Michigan / Minnesota) The issues generated by these two proposals and GPO’s responses, also remind us of the need to address the future of the FDLP as a whole.

As the chair of the ALA Committee on Legislation (COL) I invite all interested membership units - divisions and roundtables - and other stakeholders to work with COL, our Legislation Assembly and the COL Government Information Subcommittee (GIS), as we develop various opportunities, virtually and face-to-face, online and at Midwinter and Annual 2012, to discuss the immediate questions and the long term issues challenging the FDLP and how best to serve the public. We want to offer ALA members an opportunity to discuss, share information and, hopefully, develop some strategies and policies that let us move forward together.

Attached is a time line, outlining what COL will be doing to establish this process with support from the staff of ALA’s Office of Government Relations (OGR). The goal is to establish common ground by encouraging maximum participation and “safe” spaces where all can feel comfortable contributing their perspectives and knowledge.

I have already been in contact with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the Government Document Round Table (GODORT) as the two membership units that have been most involved with FDLP issues over the years. The ACRL Board recently sent a letter to GPO and the SuDoc about their concerns. GODORT has a wide range of perspectives within the roundtable and will be discussing these issues within their own membership as well. Historically, many of our other units have not been directly involved in FDLP issues, but I know that COL would like to hear from all of you. We will make sure that you are all notified as the virtual spaces and Midwinter meetings are established so that you know that all are welcomed to participate.

We will all need to be flexible, tolerant and available for discussions as the process evolves. I look forward to working with all of you. Jessica McGilvray will be our staff liaison on this effort. If she and I can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact us with your questions and ideas about moving forward.

Sincerely, Eva Poole  [Contact info: Poole and jmcgilvray@alawash.org]