



E-Government Services & Government Information June 2009

E-Government Services

The Reauthorization of the E-Government Act was scheduled for a vote at the end of the 110th Congress but was continually pushed aside to allow Congress to focus on problems with the economy. ALA has continued to work with Congress in order to increase its understanding of libraries role in E-government services and the importance of being included in any further E-government laws. As government agencies continue to digitize forms and services, public libraries – as centers for public access computing in their communities – are often the *only* organizations that offer assistance to citizens with interacting with their government and accessing E-government services.

This user assistance includes teaching how to use the Internet to search for E-government information and forms, how to locate and use various benefit programs whose applications are only available online, and how to complete job applications. Some of the most noteworthy E-government initiatives launched in recent years include electronically filing taxes, making appointments for immigration interviews, and applying for the Medicare Prescription Drug Card, an area in which librarians have become unintended experts.

Action Needed:

Advocates should contact their representatives and tell them the following:

- Public libraries must be recognized as outlets for E-government services in legislation, policy initiatives, and program literature;
- Direct support from federal, state, and local agencies to public libraries for the services that libraries offer on behalf of the agencies must be provided;
- Education and training for public library staff regarding E-government services must be established;
- Government officials must be educated regarding the roles public libraries play in relation to E-government services (including how libraries can deliver emergency services), the effect of agency referrals to public libraries, and the need to support the public library.

Scientific Research/Scholarly Publications

Every year, the federal government funds billions of dollars in scientific research. U.S. taxpayers underwrite this research and have a right to expect that its dissemination and use will be maximized and that they will have access to it. ALA is a member of the Alliance for Taxpayer Access (www.taxpayeraccess.org), a coalition of over 60 library, non-profit, and patient advocacy groups.

Action Needed:

Advocates should contact their representatives and ask them to support legislation that would promote broad and rapid dissemination of new knowledge and unrestricted access to the results of taxpayer funded scholarship and research. Also urge for all federally funded research reports be publicly accessible (ex. NIH Public Access Policy); Provide resources to modernize and maintain GPO's Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP); the FDLP has been the unique source for government information for almost 200 years.

Open the Congressional Research Service (CRS)

For the past several years, librarians, academics, journalists, open government advocates and concerned citizens have urged Congress to provide free public access through the Internet to the unclassified, taxpayer-funded reports produced by the CRS. Taxpayers spend over \$100 million a year to fund the CRS, which generates detailed reports for lawmakers. These reports play a critical role in our political process, but have

never been made available in a consistent manner to the public. Although lawmakers may give copies of the reports to their constituents upon request, this is a slow, unreliable process, and there is no way for taxpayers to know what reports have been published.

Senate Resolution 118 was sponsored by Sen. Lieberman in April of 2009 to provide Internet access to certain CRS publications.

Action Needed:

Advocates should contact their senators and ask them to support S.R. 118, sponsored by Sen. Lieberman (D-CT), which provides Internet access to certain CRS publications that would make certain CRS products including reports available on the Internet for purposes of access and retrieval by the public.

Additionally, library advocates should ask Congress to require all federal agencies to implement open access policies that emphasize the value of public access to their documents, procedures and other information and to hold agencies accountable if they do not meet the “openness” standards and do not provide long-term access to their documents, especially in digital formats. Advocates should also ask Congress to develop long-term plans for ongoing permanent public access of government information including “born digital” and legacy paper documents in conjunction with federal agencies including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), GPO, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the Library of Congress, and librarians serving the public.

Presidential Records Act (PRA)

The Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2009 (H.R. 35), introduced by Rep. Towns (D-NY), would revoke President Bush’s executive order (E.O. 13233) and other restrictions on access to presidential records. In October 2007, a U.S. District Court judge ruled that presidents do not have authority to control executive records after they have left office. This ruling invalidates part of E.O. 13233 that allows former presidents and vice presidents to review executive records before they are released under the Freedom of Information Act. Presidential records are an important resource for historians and the larger public, and it is vital that these papers are made available.

H.R. 35 passed in January (359-58) and was sent to the Senate where it is being considered by the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

Action Needed:

Advocates should contact their senators and encourage them to move H.R. 35 forward so that Congress can pass this important legislation and assure that these records are available for the American public now and in the future.

Preserving the American Historical Record Act

ALA supports H.R. 2256, the Preserving the American Historical Record Act. This bill is a bi-partisan effort sponsored by Congressman Hinchey (D-NY) and Congressman McHugh (R-NY) to ensure the proper preservation of records as well as to allow for a wide variety of access tools to the records. The bill provides \$50 million annually for preservation activities.

Action Needed:

Advocates should contact their representatives and ask them to support H.R. 2256 in an effort to provide preserved, accessible records for future generations of Americans.

Whistleblower Protections

ALA supports “whistleblower” legislation to ensure that the American public is prohibited from only that information that is truly secret. There is currently a bill in the House and Senate that would overturn a harmful U.S. Supreme Court decision from 2006, *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, which ruled that the over 21 million public employees could not claim First Amendment rights when they voice concerns to their supervisors.

- **S. 372, the *Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2009*, introduced by Sen. Akaka (D-AK) has been referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and to the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia Committees**
- H.R. 1507, the *Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2009*, introduced by Rep. Van Hollen (D-MD) has been referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

Action Needed:

Advocates should contact their representatives and ask them to pass some version of S. 372. Encourage them to finalize a bill and send it to the president’s desk for signing.