

Resolution on Greater Transparency in the Library of Congress Subject Headings Revision Process

Whereas the Library of Congress Subject Headings are used by libraries around the world;

Whereas the inaction in revision of the “Illegal aliens” subject heading for over five years after ALA called it “dehumanizing, offensive, inflammatory, and even a racial slur” has resulted in this heading remaining in library catalogs long past the point it was recognized by the library community as harmfulⁱ;

Whereas no information has been publicly shared by the Library of Congress about the “Illegal aliens” subject heading since May 2016;

Whereas in May 2017 Congress explicitly directed the Library of Congress “to make publicly available its process for changing or adding subject headings,” continuing, “[i]t is expected that the Library use a process to change or add subject headings that is clearly defined, transparent, and allows input from stakeholders including those in the congressional community”ⁱⁱ;

Whereas ALA policy B.1.2 states that all librarians shall provide “the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests;”

Whereas the ALA Strategic Directions identify “an open, inclusive, collaborative environment”ⁱⁱⁱ as a core organizational value to which the association is committed;

Whereas the subject expertise, lived experience, and access to diverse collections of Library of Congress librarians can be enhanced through input from library workers; and

Whereas the subject heading proposal process is often opaque, especially from the perspective of those outside the Subject Authority Cooperative Program, resulting in librarians being reluctant to participate in the process, leading to limited engagement and, therefore, limited perspectives represented in the headings; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the American Library Association (ALA), on behalf of its members,

1. requests the Library of Congress, with ALA’s backing, advocate to increase the staffing allocated to the Policy, Training, and Cooperative Programs Division, ensuring that questions are answered in a timely manner and regular reviews of problematic topical headings take place;
2. requests that the Library of Congress ensure transparency by revising the Cataloging and Acquisitions webpages and all documentation to ensure that outdated, inaccurate information is removed and relevant information is easy to find; and

3. requests greater openness and transparency in the Library of Congress Subject Heading proposal process, with regular status reports to the Subject Analysis Committee on anticipated timelines for future work, specifically in regard to ongoing or special projects.

Mover: Hannah Buckland, MN Chapter Councilor

Second: Whitney Buccicone, Councilor-at-Large

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- i American Library Association Council. "Resolution on replacing the Library of Congress subject heading 'Illegal Aliens' with 'Undocumented Immigrants'." January 12, 2016. <https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/1301>
 - ii United States Congress. "Congressional Record." Vol. 163 No. 76 Book III, page H4033. May 3, 2017. <https://www.congress.gov/crec/2017/05/03/CREC-2017-05-03-bk3.pdf>
 - iii American Library Association Strategic Directions. 2017. https://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/StrategicPlan/Strategic%20Directions%202017_Update.pdf