

Resolution on Replacing the Library of Congress Subject Heading "Illegal Aliens" Without Further Delay

Whereas the Library of Congress issued a press release on March 22, 2016¹ stating that "the phrase illegal aliens has become pejorative" and that the subject heading Illegal aliens "will therefore be cancelled and replaced";

Whereas the Library of Congress issued a survey on May 20, 2016 seeking feedback on its March plan to replace the subject heading Illegal aliens and stated that "Final disposition of the proposals will be announced later this year";²

Whereas more than four and a half years have passed since the survey closed on September 20, 2016 (after a deadline extension) and since then LC has not shared any information about its deliberations or plans regarding the subject heading Illegal aliens;

Whereas instructions from the House Appropriations Committee that "To the extent practicable, the Committee instructs the Library to maintain certain subject headings that reflect terminology used in title 8, United States Code" appeared only in a committee report (H. Rept. 114-594³ accompanying H.R. 5325⁴);

Whereas this instruction did not make it into the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017⁵ (H.R. 244), which "In lieu of" this "report language related to the Library of Congress' subject headings," instead directed LC "to make publicly available its process for changing or adding subject headings" and "consider appropriate sources of common terminology used to refer to a concept, including current statutory language and other legal reference sources; and other sources, such as reference materials; websites; and, titles in the Library of Congress' collection"⁶ with no mandate that LC must continue to use Illegal aliens;

Whereas the Biden administration ordered U.S. immigration enforcement agencies to stop using the term "illegal alien" in April of 2021;⁷

Whereas the ALCTS/CaMMS Subject Analysis Committee (now part of Core) convened the SAC Working Group on the LCSH "Illegal aliens," which studied the question and issued a report in July of 2016⁸ recommending that the subject heading be changed;

Whereas the Subject Analysis Committee convened the SAC Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH "Illegal aliens" in June of 2019 to assist libraries in making revisions to their own catalogs using alternatives to this LCSH, which reported in June of 2020⁹ that a survey it conducted found that at that time around forty libraries and library systems had done so;

Whereas the number of libraries and consortia that have implemented local alternatives to displaying and propagating this dehumanizing term is growing rapidly,¹⁰¹¹¹²¹³¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹²⁰²¹ indicating the library community's understanding that this problem needs to be addressed urgently; and

Whereas this issue has exposed a desire on the part of the library community for increased communication and collaboration with the Library of Congress concerning not only the LCSH in question, but wider issues related to the revision and addition of subject headings; now, therefore, be it

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

1. urges the Library of Congress to change the subject heading Illegal aliens without further delay;
2. encourages libraries to dedicate staff time and capacity to addressing and remediating problematic metadata, either through official channels with the Library of Congress, discovery platforms, or publishers, or implementing local and alternative solutions; and
3. reaffirms the positions it took in two previous resolutions -
 - Resolution on Replacing the Library of Congress Subject Heading "Illegal Aliens" with "Undocumented Immigrants," adopted January 12, 2016)²²
 - Resolution on Support of the Professional Cataloging Processes and Determinations of the Library Of Congress, adopted June 26, 2016)²³

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Secunder: Rhonda Gould, Councilor-at-Large

Version June 26, 2021, 9:49 PM PDT

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³ United States House of Representatives. House Report 114-594 - Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill, 2017. <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/114th-congress/house-report/594/1>

⁴ United States House of Representatives. H.R. 5325 - Continuing Appropriations and Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2017, and Zika Response and Preparedness Act. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/5325>

⁵ United States House of Representatives. H.R. 244 - Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/244>

⁶ United States Congress. Congressional Record. Issue: Vol. 163, No. 76. May 3, 2017. <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2017/5/3/house-section/article/h3949-2>

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