

**ALA Committee on Legislation  
Report to Council  
2020 ALA Virtual Council Meeting  
Rob Banks Chair—ALA Committee on Legislation  
June 23, 2020**

June marks the halfway mark through a challenging 2020 marked by the COVID-19 crisis, a year when library advocacy has proven more critical than ever.

### Appropriations

The beginning of the year began as expected for library advocacy, advancing the year-long effort for library funding, the top priority in the Committee on Legislation (COL) 2020 legislative agenda. For the fourth year in a row, the president sent Congress a budget request recommending cuts [of more than \\$220 million in direct library funding](#), and including the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), along with its Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and other programs. This threat was anticipated, and Public Policy & Advocacy (PPA) Office and COL were ready to immediately launch the [FY 2021 #FundLibraries Campaign](#).

ALA launched a grassroots campaign using new tools and social media to urge ALA members to contact their Representatives and Senators to ask them to sign the annual “Dear Appropriator” letters supporting LSTA and IAL. Library advocates en masse carried the message to Congress that elimination of LSTA and IAL will have devastating effects on some of our most vulnerable populations: children in low-income communities, families who cannot afford home broadband, veterans transitioning to civilian life, rural and tribal residents with limited access to important resources at home. Building on last year’s efforts, the ALA-led campaign has already proven to be successful in the House and Senate. The signatures on the bipartisan Grijalva-Young [LSTA letter](#) increased from 150 to 163, while the bipartisan Johnson-Young-McGovern [IAL letter](#) increased from 128 to 134 signatures. The Senate letter campaign was also a success as 45 Senators signed the [LSTA letter](#) and 35 signed the [IAL letter](#).

### Congressional Fly-In

Critical to the appropriations effort was the second Congressional Fly-In. On February 25-26, the ALA welcomed 75 attendees to Washington, D.C at the onset of the FY2021 appropriations cycle to raise awareness and garner support amongst members of Congress and their staff for federal library funding priorities. The Fly-In is part of a year-long strategy to engage members of Congress in different points throughout the appropriations process.

Attendees were chosen based on residence in targeted congressional districts, advocacy experience, and established relationships with elected officials, among other criteria. Among the attendees were seasoned advocates, including leadership of chapters, state, public, school and university libraries; Friends groups and library trustees; ALA Policy Corps cohort members; and COL members from all over the country. Participants focused on three strategic asks: support at least \$206 million for LSTA and \$27 million for IAL; sign the LSTA and IAL “Dear Appropriator” letters; and visit a library in their district to learn about all the important services it provides to the community.

## Advocacy Response to COVID-19 2020

COL's focus on traditional library funding was put on hold when the coronavirus pandemic led Congress to focus on relief aid. PPA worked with Congress to secure the inclusion of library funding in the largest economic stimulus package in history, which passed March 27. Quick and sustained advocacy helped. The \$2 trillion [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act](#) (CARES, S. 3548) includes [\\$50 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) (IMLS) for digital inclusion projects. Also included were more than \$30 billion in relief for schools and colleges, plus billions more for state and local governments and nonprofit organizations. The stimulus package also includes libraries—on Main Street, in schools, and on campuses—as part of a massive, long-overdue effort to ensure digital equity in America. ([Read a summary of CARES Act provisions](#) for libraries, education, and cultural heritage institutions.)

The fourth emergency relief package remains “under construction” in Congress. In May, the House approved their proposal for a fourth, large scale COVID-19 relief package, the [Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions](#) Act (HEROES, H.R. 6800). The bill includes more than \$3 trillion in Federal aid to respond to COVID-19, including education- and workforce-related funding and other provisions. The House bill provided an additional \$5 million for IMLS funding. HEROES Act also included \$4 billion for an Emergency Broadband Connectivity Fund to pay for broadband service (and up to \$100 for a laptop or tablet) for low-income, households with free and reduced-price lunch individuals, and households with an individual who has been laid off or furloughed and had a significant loss of income.

We have yet to discern how the Senate will respond with its own next stimulus package but early plans for Senate engagement by advocates are in place. Increased interest in equitable access to broadband has resulted in 17 broadband bills this Congress thus far. Moving forward, broadband advocacy seems to be the more likely path for library support.

## PPA Pivots to Virtual National Library Legislative Week

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, COL approved PPA's proactive decision to cancel National Library Legislative Day (NLLD) 2020, ALA's in-person lobbying and training event. The event was modified to become a [full-week virtual experience](#), focusing on relationship-building and digital engagement for library advocates of all kinds. Our vision was that library advocates will have the opportunity to hear from each other, to train virtually, and to continue creating connections and relationships with decision makers at every level of government. PPA worked on this plan in close coordination with the COL, Chapter Relations Office, United for Libraries, and other member advocacy leaders across the association. Chapters are a major part and focus of this effort—we believe a strong network of chapters are the foundation of a strong national organization.

## COL reaches out to ALA divisions

COL members, once again, are reaching out to the boards of each ALA division to share information about the association's legislative activities but this year via video. COL seeks to hear questions or suggestions from the divisions or any ALA unit. We hope we can reach more member since members can view the video at their convenience.

## ALA Policy Corps

The [Policy Corps initiative](#) aims to develop a cadre of experts with deep and sustained knowledge of national public policies in areas key to ALA's strategic goals. COL is continuing to work closely with the Policy Corps and continues to discuss how the program can broaden ALA advocacy across the association. COL was involved in the selection of the third Corps cohort.

## On the Horizon ...

### Broadband Advocacy

Because the novel coronavirus has brought long overdue attention to digital inequity that cuts across rural, urban, tribal, and suburban communities, there is increasing momentum in both the House and Senate for the federal government to address the desperate need for home internet access. Representative Grace Meng (D-NY-6) introduced a new version of her "Closing the Homework Gap through Mobile Hotspots Act" ([endorsed by ALA](#) in 2019) to address the near term need for home connectivity. The [Emergency Education Connections Act](#) calls for \$2 billion in funding for hotspots, routers, modems, and other connected devices such as laptops. This bill was incorporated in the HEROES Act. Public and tribal libraries, K12 schools and tribal schools are eligible for funding. On the Senate side, Senator Markey (D-MA) led the [introduction](#) of a companion bill calling for \$4 billion. The greater amount in the Senate bill addresses the increasing concern in many school districts that social distancing requirements will continue into the fall. ALA has endorsed both bills and signed onto a coalition letter for the \$4 billion Senate version, along with over 50 education groups, including our longtime partners in the Education and Libraries Networks Coalition. PPA put out an action alert in collaboration with the Public Library Association calling for members to contact their senators and share examples of their digital inclusion work in response to the pandemic. PPA staff and members of ALA's E-rate Task Force continue to work with our coalition partners to ensure this funding is part of the HEROES Act.

### Copyright Legislation

Copyright activity has been heating up with a newly released U.S. Copyright Office [report](#) on Section 512 of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and new efforts by the Senate Judiciary Intellectual Property subcommittee to revise the take down and notice procedure that protects online service providers from third party liability. The 512 report concluded that "section 512 safe harbor system is askew," taking the position that "authors, creators, and rightsholders of all sorts and sizes" believe that the current operation of 512 does not meet the original objectives of Congress. The IP subcommittee indicated in Congressional [hearings](#) their intention to revise the law, including implementing so-called "notice and stay down" policies, Internet filtering and denial of service for alleged repeat infringers. For libraries, an over-zealous approach to piracy could lead to internet outages and intellectual freedom concerns. On the other hand, copyright legislative objectives are proposed and then postponed indefinitely due to lack of consensus and controversy, but copyright advocacy may be necessary.

The [Copyright Alternative in Small-Claims Enforcement](#) (CASE) Act (S. 1273) is currently stalled but Senate negotiations to revise the legislation— including providing a permanent opt-out for libraries and non-profit educational and research institutions from the small claims court tribunal continue—led by Senator Wyden (D-OR).

COL encourages all ALA members to advocate for library priorities

Successful advocacy for library policy priorities relies on the active and continued engagement of ALA members as community leaders and policy advocates. There may be many calls to action this year due to COVID-19, regular appropriations, broadband and other bills that may pop up this year. COL encourages library professionals and supporters to join in the ongoing work of fostering relationships with policymakers in their communities. COL asks ALA members to consider inviting their members of

Congress to visit a local library this spring to show them how the library is transforming your community. ALA's public policy and advocacy staff can advise ALA members on how to begin working with the staff in your congressional district office. You can also find resources on ALA's website: [ala.org/advocacy/build-relationships](http://ala.org/advocacy/build-relationships)

## Task Force and Subcommittee Reports

### T State Ecosystem Task Force

The State Ecosystem Task Force is finalizing its strong ecosystems toolkit, which the task force will present during a webinar in a late summer or early fall. The task force will sunset after the presentation of the toolkit, but the Committee on Library Advocacy (COLA) has voted to create an ecosystem subcommittee to ensure that the work of the task force is sustained within ALA. COLA also finalized its best practices for advocacy websites, guidance that will be available as a web-based and downloadable resource from [ala.org](http://ala.org).

### Grassroots

The COL Grassroots subcommittee helped to spread the message regarding Virtual National Library Legislative Day and encouraged participation in daily activities. Additionally, subcommittee members participated in submitting questions via webinars and testimonials via the advocacy hotline.

### Copyright

The Copyright Legislation, Education and Advocacy Network (CLEAN) subcommittee met twice virtually to discuss recent copyright developments including the Music Modernization Act and the Supreme Court ruling in [Georgia v. PublicResource.org](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19-1232). CLEAN also submitted comments in response to the Notice of Inquiry from the U.S. Copyright Office on the meaning of "published" in the online environment. Currently, the subcommittee is asking that a blanket license for mechanical rights with a preferential rate be established for cultural heritage institutions that wish to make non-commercial digital performances. In the implementation of the Music Modernization Act, non-profits were ignored by members of the newly established Music Licensing Collective. CLEAN had three copyright programs accepted for Annual 2020 and hopes to find another avenue for programming.

### Census Task Force

The Census Bureau has [adapted its 2020 Census operations in response to COVID-19](#). All in-person census-taking and field activities were paused as a public health precaution, and activities are resuming in certain areas based on local conditions. The largest field operation, door-to-door follow-up with households that haven't responded yet, will begin August 11. As of May 28, [60.3% of households have responded](#) to the 2020 Census. Residents can respond until October 31.

Libraries also have adapted their census outreach activities in response to COVID-19. Out of public libraries responding to the [PLA survey](#) released April 9, more than 60% report using social media to promote participation in the 2020 Census, and more than 80% report they left on their public Wi-Fi access when the library building was closed. From social media and virtual events to posters and bookmarks, examples of how libraries are adapting their 2020 Census activities are described in articles from [American Libraries](#) and [Smart Cities Dive](#) (which were written by and quote PPA staff).

PPA's Census work has also drawn new financial support to ALA and libraries. Thanks to new partners, in April ALA awarded [21 additional Library Census Equity Fund mini-grants](#) courtesy of the LOR Foundation and [13 additional mini-grants](#) courtesy of Capital One. ALA will continue to provide resources to support libraries' activities in response to COVID-19 and the Census Bureau's changes. PPA staff will discuss the Census at the ALA Virtual Event session, ["Library Advocacy & Civic Engagement During & After COVID-19,"](#) on June 24, 2020, 2:30 – 3:30 pm CT.

## National Network

In January 2020, the *American Library Association* (ALA) launched a robust advocacy pilot program, *The National Network of Key Contacts* (NN). Member volunteers serve the NN as issue ambassadors in support of all ALA member organizations and affiliates. This program's goal is to assemble long-term relationships with Members of Congress and their staffs nationwide, deriving from the Member's District Office. The NN is currently deployed with 25 member volunteers in three states, Alabama, Florida, and New York. Under the direction of Kathi Kromer, Associate Executive Director, Richard Cerros, Assistant Director from ALA *Public Policy & Advocacy* (PPA) and David Lusk, consultant from Key Advocacy are coordinating efforts.