



April 28, 2016

U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Capitol; H-305  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Request to Remove "Library of Congress Classification"  
Amendment from Legislative Branch Appropriations Legislation

Dear Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey and Members of the Committee:

We write today on behalf of the more than 58,000 members of the American Library Association and of the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS): the division of ALA members expert in cataloging and classification. We do so to respectfully urge the House Appropriations Committee to strike language in legislation just adopted by its Legislative Branch Subcommittee that would bar the Library of Congress (Library) from implementing an appropriate and thoroughly researched change in its subject heading classifications announced in late March of this year.

Specifically, the Library proposes to replace the terms "Aliens" with "Noncitizens," and "Illegal aliens" with two headings: "Noncitizens" and/or "Unauthorized immigration." While some see politics in this decision, Mr. Chairman, as library professionals viewing the work of our colleagues we see only attention to historical detail, intellectual honesty, procedural transparency, and faithfulness to long-standing precepts and practices of librarianship. These have been the hallmarks of cataloging for all of ALCTS' nearly 60 years and of almost 130 years of library science. Stripped of polemic and sensationalism, these are the facts underpinning the Library of Congress' frankly routine and professional determination:

- ***The Library of Congress has a long-established, often used process for reviewing and updating outdated subject headings and establishing new ones as needed that preserves all prior versions of updated headings.***<sup>1</sup> Such updates may be proposed from outside or within the Library of Congress, but the Library makes the final decision on all changes to subject headings. The Library reviews each change proposal individually and typically adopts over a thousand each year.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Stone, A. (2000). "The LCSH Century: A Brief History of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, and Introduction to the Centennial Essays." *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 29(1-2). Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://www.catalogingandclassificationquarterly.com/ccq29nr1-2ed.htm>

<sup>2</sup> In the 1970s, the Library moved to an electronic cataloging system in part precisely so that it could modify its subject headings more frequently, easily and efficiently in order – consistent with professional cataloging standards and practices - to better reflect actual social norms and usage.

Indeed, the heading change now before the Committee was one of 90 such modifications proposed en masse by the Library in March. When a subject heading is changed, references to previous headings are effectively retained indefinitely so that researchers who perform a search for a former heading are certain to be directed to all relevant materials. No document in the Library of Congress' (or any library's) collection itself is ever substantively edited, modified, annotated or "corrected" in any way as the result of a subject heading update like the one interdicted by the Subcommittee's recent action. Only its catalog "label" is altered.

- ***The Library's process in this case was rigorous, transparent, and consistent with the highest standards of professional cataloging practice.*** The Library was first asked 18 months ago, quite publicly, to review its use of the cataloging term "illegal aliens" by one of the nation's preeminent colleges. That request, with modifications, subsequently was echoed by the American Library Association upon debate and approval of a formal Resolution by its more than 180-member Council in January of 2016.<sup>3</sup> A "stakeholders" meeting with all appropriate expert sections from within the Library then was convened just over two months ago at which both outside requests, and the broader issues they raised, were reviewed in detail. It is a measure of the Library's professionalism and independence that, in fact, neither external proposal as submitted actually was accepted. Rather, upon review of the totality of the facts and consistent with venerable cataloging practice, the Library apolitically crafted the proposed policy described above and now before the Committee.
- ***Decisions to update a subject heading are based on many considerations, including "literary warrant:" the frequency with which a term is or is not used in print and other dynamic resources that, by their nature, change with and reflect current social structures and norms.***<sup>4</sup> For subject headings that refer to groups of people, special attention is paid to: popular usage; terms used by members of the group to self-identify; and avoiding terms that are widely considered pejorative toward the group being described. Applying these same standards in the past, for example, the Library of Congress uneventfully changed the subject classification "Negroes" to "Afro-Americans" and again to "African Americans" over a period of years. The catalog term "Cripples" similarly morphed over time, first to "Handicapped" and later to "People with disabilities." Congress made no move to countermand those expert cataloging determinations.

---

<sup>3</sup> ALA Council Document #34 (2016, January 12). "Resolution on Replacing the Library of Congress Subject Heading 'Illegal Aliens' with 'Undocumented Immigrants.'" Retrieved April 27, 2016, from the American Library Association Institutional Repository (ALAIR). <https://alair.ala.org/bitstream/handle/11213/1301/01-12-16-CD34.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>4</sup> The United States Code, while modifiable by Congress, ordinarily would not be deemed a dynamic information source to which the Library's (or any) catalogers appropriately would look for guidance in keeping subject headings current consistent with professional cataloging standards and practices. When terms in the Code are modified, such changes often are not comprehensive or consistent. For example, while Title 8 uses the term "illegal alien," it also employs "unauthorized alien" See, e.g., §1324(a).

- ***The Library reasonably and properly concluded in this instance that, when used in reference to people, the long-used terms "illegal" and "alien" have in recent decades acquired derogatory connotations, become pejorative, and been associated with nativist and racist sentiments.***<sup>5</sup> As the Library has noted: the heading “Aliens” has been in use by the Library since 1910; “Aliens, illegal” came into official use more than 35 years ago; and “Illegal aliens” has been in service for almost a quarter-century. Over that long span of time, and particularly in recent years, referring to undocumented *persons* (as opposed to forms of conduct) as “illegal” increasingly has been widely acknowledged as dehumanizing, offensive, inflammatory, and even a racial slur.

This shift has been plain and pronounced, as the Library observed, in precisely the kind of dynamic materials that cataloging standards require any Library to assess in evaluating the suitability of a subject heading in use and its prospective modification. Indeed, in recent years many national news organizations (including the Associated Press, USA Today, ABC, Chicago Tribune, and Los Angeles Times) categorically have stopped using the word “illegal” to describe human beings as a matter of editorial policy.

Moreover, the Pew Research Center has documented that their actions were not merely anecdotal or aberrant in any way. To the contrary, Pew compared use of the term “illegal aliens” in U.S. newspapers during the same two-week period in 1996, 2002, 2007 and 2013 (all times when immigration matters were much in the news). It found that use of that phrase declined precipitously over the most recent 6-year period surveyed, appearing in 21% of news reports in 2007 but just 5% in 2013: a 76% reduction in use and all-time low.<sup>6</sup>

We understand, Mr. Chairman, why some have chosen to politicize the Library’s proposed subject heading changes discussed above. In light of the foregoing, however, ***it is the view of our Associations that, at minimum, the Library of Congress’ recent proposed reclassifications discussed above are fully consistent with accepted professional cataloging standards and practices. Indeed, we believe that a compelling case can be made that the proposed changes are required by them.*** We hope that the foregoing description of the standards and practices of our profession, rigorously adhered to and unimpeachably applied by the Library of Congress in this case, will assist the Committee to accept the Library’s independent professional cataloging determinations.

Specifically, we urge you and all Members of the Committee to strike all language from any piece of appropriations legislation that would countermand or modify the Library’s recent determinations pertaining to the terms “Aliens” and/or “Illegal aliens,” and to oppose any other legislation that would have similar effect.

---

<sup>5</sup> See, “Library of Congress to Cancel the Subject Heading “Illegal Aliens” Executive Summary (2016, March 22). Retrieved April 26, 2016, from: <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/illegal-aliens-decision.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Guskin, E. (2013, June 17). ‘Illegal,’ ‘undocumented,’ ‘unauthorized’: News media shift language on immigration. Retrieved April 27, 2016, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/17/illegal-undocumented-unauthorized-news-media-shift-language-on-immigration>

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the Committee with a factual context in which to consider its upcoming actions. Please contact us should you or your staff have any questions, or require any additional information.

Respectfully submitted,



Sari Feldman, President  
American Library Association \*



Norm Medeiros, President,  
Association for Library Collections  
& Technical Services †

---

\* Founded in 1957, the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS, pronounced 'uh-lex') is a division of the American Library Association and the national association for more than 3,500 information providers who work in collections and technical services. Its members are dedicated to the acquisition, identification, cataloging, classification, and preservation of all kinds of library materials. Their work includes: developing and coordinating the country's library resources; selecting and evaluating library materials for acquisition, and developing all forms of library resources.

† Established 140 years ago this year, the American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 58,000 members in academic, public, school, government, and special libraries. The mission of the American Library Association is to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. Its Washington Office has been the voice of libraries and library supporters in the nation's capital since 1946.