

# **DOPA Information Packet:**

## **A Resource for Librarians & Library Workers**

Compiled by:



For nearly 50 years YALSA has been the world leader in recommending reading listening and viewing for teens.

50 East Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611  
1.800.545.2433 x4390  
[www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa)

updated August 8, 2006

**What is DOPA?** DOPA stands for the Deleting Online Predators Act, which is legislation that was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in July. The issue will come before the U.S. Senate, probably in September. If the Senate takes this issue on, it is likely they will draft their own version of a bill and try to move that forward. Any legislation that seeks to block access to web sites that use social networking technologies would have serious implications for libraries that receive the e-rate and for their patrons.

- To read the bill and to access transcripts and related information from the hearings that were held in the House, go to <http://tinyurl.com/ncjzh>.
- To access information and resources from ALA about DOPA, go to
  - [www.ala.org/ala/washoff/WOissues/techinttele/dopa/DOPA.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/WOissues/techinttele/dopa/DOPA.htm)
  - [www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/onlinesocialnetworks.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/onlinesocialnetworks.htm)

**Talking Points about Social Networking Technologies** (share these with your community members & use them when contacting your Senator's office)

**1. The terminology used in DOPA is still overly broad and unclear.**

As written, this legislation blocks access to many valuable websites that utilize this type of communication, websites whose benefits outweigh their detriments.

**2. The value of Interactive Web applications can't be ignored.**

New Internet-based applications (also known as social networking technologies) for collaboration, business and learning are becoming increasingly important, and young people must be prepared to thrive in a work atmosphere where meetings take place online and where online networks are essential communication tools.

**3. Education, not laws blocking access, is the key to safe use of the Internet.**

Libraries and schools are where young people learn essential information literacy skills that go far beyond computer instruction and web searching. Indeed, DOPA blocks use of these sites in the very environments where librarians and teachers can instruct students about how to use all kinds of applications safely and effectively, and where young people can learn how to report and avoid unsafe sites.

**4. Local decision-making - not federal law - is the way to address the challenges of social networking technologies.**

Such decisions are already being made locally, in part due to the requirements of the Children's Online Protection Act (CIPA) for E-rate recipients. This additional requirement is not necessary.

**5. Requiring libraries and schools to block social networking web sites would restrict access to technology in the communities that need public access most.**

DOPA, for example, requires libraries and schools receiving E-rate discounts through the Universal Service Program to block computer users from accessing Interactive Web applications of all kinds, thereby limiting opportunities for those who do not have Internet access at home. This unfairly denies children and adults in the poorest communities from accessing appropriate content, and from learning how best to safely manage their own Internet use in consultation with experienced librarians and teachers.

## **RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS**

(Adopted by the ALA Council on Wednesday, June 28, 2006 in New Orleans, Louisiana)

WHEREAS, the online environment is an essential and growing part of economic, cultural, civic and social life; and

WHEREAS, the use of new Internet-based applications for collaboration and learning are increasingly important; and

WHEREAS, learning to use the online environment effectively and safely is an essential component of education and is increasingly promoting collaborative learning and social environments; and

WHEREAS, classrooms, school libraries and public libraries are the locations where a major part of this education occurs and where professional teachers and librarians are the adults best trained to educate young people to use online environments effectively and safely; and

WHEREAS, the development of essential information literacy skills require that young people be able to safely and effectively use these important new collaborative tools; and

WHEREAS, schools and libraries are critical environments for learning these skills and already have Internet use policies; and

WHEREAS, H.R. 5319, the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA), as presently drafted, would require schools and libraries receiving E-rate discounts to block library computer users from accessing collaborative networking sites like MySpace, and would also bar access to a wide array of other important applications and technologies such as instant messaging, e-mail, wikis and blogs; and

WHEREAS, the H.R., 5319, the Deleting Online Predators Act, (DOPA) would require schools and libraries receiving E-rate funds to block important access to important new network-based collaborative environments that foster these crucial skills in our young people; and

WHEREAS, "DOPA" would place prior restraints on and denies access to constitutionally protected speech; and

WHEREAS, H.R. 5319 is unnecessary because schools and libraries receiving E-rate funds are already required to block obscene content; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association oppose the Deleting Online Predators Act as it is presently drafted; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association affirm the importance of online social networks to library users of all ages for developing and using essential information literacy skills; and be it further

RESOLVED, that ALA ask library supporters to contact their representatives and senators to inform them about the important role "social networking sites" serve in civic participation, collaboration, etc. and about problems caused by mandatory blocking as proposed in H.R. 5319; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that ALA communicate this resolution to the United States Congress and to others, as appropriate.

## Sample Letter to the Editor

(please feel free to make additions or changes so that it better fits any particular messages you want to get across)

Librarians care deeply about children and teens and are concerned about their safety online and in our community. While Congress' effort to make children and teens more safe online is admirable, the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA) will actually do little to make our kids safer. What it will do is block access to critical Internet resources and communication tools in schools and libraries that our kids need to learn how to use in order to be successful in college and the workplace. It also takes control away from communities like ours, and leaves the decision making about what our children can access on the Internet to the politicians in Washington DC.

DOPA will further limit kids' access to online resources at school and in libraries. That means it would prevent librarians and teachers from instructing students and their parents about how to use all kinds of Web applications safely and effectively. Because it is linked to federal funding, DOPA also hurts most those kids served by schools and libraries in low-income communities.

DOPA restricts online support groups, email programs through which family members can communicate with each other, and educational tools used to provide distance education, squashing kids' first attempts at becoming acquainted with applications that will soon be essential workplace tools. Just one example of what has been lost in a rush to legislate is a recent online field trip to Carlsbad Caverns in N.M., in which more than 10 million students participated and First Lady Laura Bush took part.

Perhaps the most troubling part of DOPA is the false sense of security it gives parents who are seeking solutions to the problem of online predators. Like dangers to kids in the real world, dangers on the Internet are not easily overcome. Teaching young people to practice safe behaviors and guard their privacy online the same way they would in public is critical if we want to protect them.

Please join me in urging Congress to make a real commitment to kids' safety by abandoning bad legislation like DOPA and funding our libraries and schools adequately so they have the resources they need to empower our community's kids to stay safe on the Internet.

Sincerely,

## Six Simple Steps to Save Your Library & its Patrons from DOPA

**1. Contact your Senator before Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> to:**

- a. Educate him/her about the positive uses of Social Networking Sites (use the information in YALSA's Toolkit on Teens & Social Networking in School & Public Libraries).
- b. Tell him/her your opinion of legislation like DOPA that would unfairly restrict access to critical online communication tools. (see YALSA's Legislative Advocacy Guide for quick tips on contacting your Senator).

To find out who our Senator is & what number to call, go here:

[www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org). To email your Senator, go to [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org) and click on "Take Action Now." When you get to the next page, be sure to click on the link called "Contact Senate About Importance of Social Networking Sites."

**2. Personalize and send the accompanying sample letter to the editor to your local newspaper,** and encourage your library patrons to do the same.

**3. Sign the online petition opposing DOPA** at [www.saveyourspace.org](http://www.saveyourspace.org).

**4. Host an information session at your library about social networking sites** (see YALSA's Toolkit on Teens & Social Networking in School & Public Libraries for tips and ideas).

**5. Tell YALSA how you're using social networking technologies at your library.**

- a. Go to <http://teentechweek.wikispaces.com> and click on "Online Social Networking." From there you can add a link to your library's MySpace space as well as join in on the discussion about how you're using social networking technologies in your library.

**6. Invite your Senator to your library** while they're home from DC between August 7<sup>th</sup> and September 4<sup>th</sup>.

- a. Have teens on hand to demonstrate productive ways they use social networking technologies
- b. Provide the Senator with a photo-op (e.g. giving a summer reading award to a teen or reading a story to kids)
- c. Give the Senator information about social networking sites and show him/her what your library is already doing to keep children and teens safe online.