

ALA's Washington Office hosts ACRL leaders and scholarship winners at National Library Legislative Day

Four college and research librarians who won ACRL scholarships to the 2018 National Library Legislative Day (NLLD) and ACRL leaders, including Immediate Past President Irene Herold and Executive Director Mary Ellen Davis, were hosted by ALA's Washington Office for an in-depth briefing on the federal policymaking process. The meeting, which took place during National Library Legislative Day on May 8, focused on two case studies illustrating the unpredictability of the current political environment and the need for sustained, year-round advocacy—a common theme of the 2018 NLLD.

The conversation explored the ongoing net neutrality debate as a case study in the rapid changes in public policy that can take place simply due to changes in leadership at the agency level. After the 2016 election, then-Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chair Tom Wheeler was succeeded by Commissioner Ajit Pai. During Wheeler's tenure, in 2015 the FCC undertook the largest regulatory endeavor to clarify the U.S. net neutrality policy.

Less than one year after Pai took the helm of the FCC, the network neutrality protections passed in 2015 were dismantled despite widespread opposition by the public and strong advocacy efforts of library and higher education associations as well as other civil society groups. At this point, net neutrality advocates' best hope is a decision in the courts overturning the FCC's actions. It will take sustained, year-round advocacy to maintain the momentum to return to the strong 2015 net neutrality protections.

The other case study involved the Marrakesh Treaty Implementation Act (S.2259). The circuitous path to get the bill introduced in March

2018 lasted more than ten years and took library advocates to protracted convenings at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Geneva. The concept for the treaty began with an informal coalition of associations for the print disabled, libraries, and international library and civil society groups with the idea of mandating a copyright exception to end the "book famine" for people with print disabilities around the world.

Under one U.S. delegation to WIPO, made up of representatives of executive branch units and departments, the idea of a treaty was considered absurd. Under the next delegation, a treaty for the blind was regarded as an opportunity for America to lead the world in a humanitarian effort. The full 180-degree turnaround resulted in a treaty signed at a diplomatic conference in Marrakesh in 2013. But the politics didn't stop at the international level: introducing implementing legislation in the United States took years of stakeholder negotiations at the national level between interagency groups, the library community, publishers, and the National Federation for the Blind. ALA's advocacy strategy was to be at every table, to write comments whenever requested, and endure delay tactics that stood in the way until S. 2559 was finally introduced this spring and approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

ALA's Washington Office staff and inside-the-Beltway advisors encouraged ACRL members and leadership to use their influence to take an active role in fighting for stronger public policies year-round, using similar steps taken to reach net neutrality and Treaty goals: submitting comments to federal agencies, filing amicus briefs in the courts, partnering with campus leaders and federal relations offices, urging federal elected leaders to cosponsor legislation, and developing local relationships with congressional offices by inviting members of Congress and district staff to the library. *ZZ*

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