

Government information policy and database legislation have been busy issues for ALA and other library advocates in recent weeks.

These two issues will likely continue on the Congressional agenda through the summer, even as the difficult debate continues in Congress about the FY2000 appropriations and whether the budget caps, set to establish a balanced budget, will be lifted or adjusted to ease the "pressure" on appropriations to make major cuts.

At the same time the issues of gun control and Internet filtering are entangled in the very partisan debate on the juvenile justice bill.

Government information issues

On May 19, Tom W. Sloan—director of the Delaware State Library and member of the ALA Committee on Legislation—testified on behalf of ALA on H.R. 1790, the Chemical Safety Information and Site Security Act of 1999, before the House Commerce Subcommittee on Health and Environment.

H.R. 1790 proposes that federal depository libraries provide qualified or limited access to the EPA information on risk management plans and other EPA information that would be publicly available regarding chemical manufacturing sites as authorized in the Clean Air Act.

At issue is whether worse case scenario information about the sites should be publicly available.

H.R. 1790 proposes to limit the types of copying of the worse case scenario material by potentially limiting how many requests and how many sites could be made available, and, under some circumstances, collecting information or limiting who could get access—all options the library community cannot support.

EPA had previously indicated that in June 1999 the entire database would be available online. However, federal law enforcement officials and others raised concerns about the

risk of terrorism if the full database, especially the worse case scenarios, became publicly available.

ALA supports the public's right to know and have full access to the entire EPA database about these sites and opposes the administration's proposal that would restrict the kind of access federal depository libraries would be allowed to provide.

For further information, contact Lynne Bradley at (800) 941-8478 or e-mail: leb@alawash.org. (Sloan's full testimony is available online at <http://www.ala.org/washoff/statements.html>.)

Database legislation

On May 26, the House Judiciary Committee approved by voice vote H.R. 354, the Collections of Information Antipiracy Act, with several amendments.

The House Judiciary Committee and its Subcommittee on Courts and Intellectual Property attempted to adjust the bill in response to the serious concerns expressed by the scientific, education, and library communities as well as some commercial interests.

The bill's approach to database protection assumes that many uses of databases should be unlawful, but then tries to set a series of exceptions that attempt to be helpful but are incomplete and problematic, even as most recently amended.

A less problematic approach would be to focus on database piracy, which truly undermines the original database developer's incentive to invest.

As we go to press, the House Judiciary Committee had not filed its report with the text of the revised bill as approved by the committee. Other hearings are pending.

Watch the ALA Washington Online Newsletter (ALAWON) for updates on this issue and other legislation in the next few weeks. ■

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