

Highlights of the History of the AALL Government Relations Office (formerly the Washington Affairs Office) [updated as of February 2009]

***Introduction:** Early in the history of the American Association of Law Libraries (founded in 1906), its members and leaders recognized a need for the Association to take a public role and to participate in legislative, judicial, and regulatory processes. But it wasn't until the late 1980s that AALL began to develop a formal government relations program and a presence in Washington, D.C. This document traces the steps by which AALL became involved in advocacy at the federal level by establishing a Washington Affairs Representative, which led to the Washington Affairs Office (now the Government Relations Office). Today the GRO also addresses information policy issues at the state and international levels. The following brief history traces the evolution of AALL's advocacy representation and office.*

1988—President Margaret Leary appoints a Special Committee on National Information Policy for a two-year term. Chair is Robert Oakley.

1988—“Does AALL Need a Lobbyist?” program is held at AALL Annual Meeting in Atlanta

1989—Special Committee on National Information Policy submits an Interim Report [83 Law Libr. J. 149 (1991) but not posted as a separate document yet on AALLNET] to the Executive Board.

This report contained ten recommendations which, when taken together, were designed to (a) increase the awareness of AALL members about the public policy issues that affect them as law librarians, (b) create an organizational structure by which AALL can effectively track and respond to such issues, and (c) create a presence for the Association in Washington, D.C. Most of the ten recommended actions were adopted in some form by the Board, including: “The identification of two people in the Washington area who would be able and willing to make a three- to five-year commitment on behalf of the Association to develop relations with the D.C. offices of other library organizations, with Congress and with other federal agencies and offices.” Before making their recommendations (for AALL to become much more active in national affairs) the Committee consulted with representatives of ALA, SLA, and MLA, as well as with a professional lobbyist. Everyone who was consulted felt that a “continuing Washington presence” was critical to the success of such an effort, for three main reasons:

- Important for an AALL representative to be part of the informal, but very real, network that exists in Washington.
- An AALL contact in Washington would soon be known by members of Congress and would be able to consult them and be consulted by them about concerns.
- A regular Washington representative for AALL could be called upon on short notice to attend a meeting or a hearing on which AALL had some interest.

“The Special Committee considered meeting this objective by establishing a Washington office similar to SLA and ALA, or through the hiring of a paid lobbyist to act on our behalf. In both cases, the Special Committee concluded that the time was not right for such a step....a branch office (of AALL Headquarters) is a possibility, but the committee felt that it, like the idea of a paid lobbyist, is premature...Accordingly, the Special Committee does not rule out either possibility for the future, but it strongly believes that the first steps—much less expensive steps—are those indicated in this report.”

1989—In June the AALL Executive Board approved a restructuring of the existing Legislation and Legal Developments Committee into the Government Relations Committee and the appointment of Robert Oakley of Georgetown University Law Library and Joanne Zich of American University’s Washington College of Law as Washington representatives for the Association. Oakley was serving at the time as Chair of the Special Committee on National Information Policy. Zich had served as Chair of the Legislation and Legal Developments Committee in 1986-87. Both Oakley and Zich had prior experience preparing Congressional testimony and Oakley had testified at several hearings.

1990—On May 31, Special Committee on National Information Policy submits its Final Report [83 Law Libr. J. 177 (1991) but not posted yet as a separate document on AALLNET] to the Executive Board, which includes several further recommendations. Those actions approved by the Board on June 15 include adoption of the proposed Government Relations policy, amending the charge to the Washington representatives to clarify that they are spokespersons for the Association, and requesting a review by the Washington representatives of their work at the end of the first three years (so, in 1992). The report states that Joanne Zich and Charlotte White drafted the proposed Government Relations Policy. Both of them had previously chaired the AALL Legislation and Legal Developments Committee. The version of the policy which was approved by the Board is found at 83 Law Libr. J. 191 (1991). As the Special Committee report states, this policy is intended to “provide a guide to the Executive Director, the Washington representatives, members of the Executive Board, and anyone else who might be discussing AALL’s public policy concerns.” In regard to the Government Relations Committee, the report further states that “the scope of activity of the Committee is limited to that which is ‘consistent with’ the government relations policy.”

June 18, 1990—The first Annual Legislative Update is held at the AALL Annual Meeting in Minneapolis.

1991—In July Joanne Zich steps down from her position as one of AALL’s two Washington Affairs Representatives, having been elected Vice-President/President-Elect of the Law Librarians’ Society of Washington, D.C. Bob Oakley continues to serve as Washington Affairs Representative, which from that time forward becomes a one-person representation.

1992—In June, Bob Oakley submits a Report of the Washington Affairs Representative on AALL’s Government Relations Program and Recommendations for the Future [posted

on AALLNET as pp. 69-114 of the WAO Background Reading: www.aallnet.org/committee/waor/wao-background-reading.pdf]. The report recommends hiring a full-time assistant to support the work of the current Representative.

Appendix A to that report is the Report of the Government Relations Committee on the Washington Affairs Representative. [Tim Coggins, Chair] [This appendix does not yet appear on AALLNET but Sally Holterhoff has a print copy of it.] That report considered various options for an AALL Representative in Washington:

- Practicing Librarian as Representative
- Lobbyist to represent the Association
- Other alternatives, including a student or other intern; a full-time Deputy Representative; move Headquarters to Washington; partnership between a hired lobbyist and a practicing law librarian; sharing a lobbyist with other organizations; “growing our own”; and continuing Bob Oakley’s term indefinitely.

1993—Susan Tulis, AALL member and law librarian at University of Virginia Law Library, takes a one-year leave in order to accept a temporary position in Washington, D.C. as AALL Assistant Washington Affairs Representative. She begins working in March. In October 1993, Bob Oakley and Susan Tulis submit to the Executive Board a Report on the Assistant Washington Affairs Representative position: Eight Months After. [Not posted on AALLNET yet but Sally Holterhoff has a print copy.] This joint report notes that in eight months time, AALL had been involved in ten major information policy issues and seven lesser ones, far more than could have been addressed by a volunteer member serving as Representative on a part-time basis while also working full-time as a law librarian.

“As a result of having not only the Washington Affairs Representative, but now an Assistant, AALL has gained increased presence, visibility, and a name for itself in Washington, DC. As issues come up we are frequently contacted for our advice and opinion. We have also earned the reputation of being an association that is willing to listen to the various sides of an issue before taking a stand.”

Oakley and Tulis recommended that the Assistant position be continued indefinitely and that it continue to be housed at the Georgetown University Law Library for the duration of the term of the current Representative, concluding that the existing arrangements seemed to effectively meet the need of AALL at that time. They listed several “unanswered questions,” stating that these questions should be answered [in the future] when the need arises.

- What happens in two years when Bob Oakley’s term as Washington Affairs Representative ends?
- Where will the assistant be located after that time?
- If AALL shared office space with another library association, it might make it difficult for AALL to maintain its separate identity.

- If an independent office is established in the law library context, is that a bad thing?
- Is it appropriate to have a full-time AALL staff person reporting to a part-time volunteer member?

Summer, 1993—AALL VP-President-Elect Kay Todd names a Task Force on AALL's Government Relations Activities, with a goal of achieving better coordination of such activities. Chair is Tim Coggins.

1994—The AALL Executive Board at its Spring meeting approves a motion to change the status of the Washington Affairs Representative position to an “indefinite, continuing term serving at the pleasure of the President and the Executive Board.” [Note: this is documented in the Task Force report discussed below, at Footnote 16.]

1994—On June 21, the Task Force on AALL's Government Relations Activities submits its Final Report [Posted on AALLNET as pp. 115-129 of the WAO Background Reading found at: [/www.aallnet.org/committee/waor/wao-background-reading.pdf](http://www.aallnet.org/committee/waor/wao-background-reading.pdf)] to the Executive Board. The report contains nine recommendations, five of which specifically refer to the Washington Affairs Representative. Four were adopted by the AALL Executive Board:

- The Washington Affairs Representative should determine when the Assistant Washington Affairs Representative should speak for AALL.
- The Washington Affairs Representative should attend all AALL Executive Board meetings.
- The responsibilities of official representatives to groups involved in government relations activities should be transferred to the Washington Affairs Representative.
- The Washington Affairs Representative should develop an ongoing effort to educate the members of AALL about the Association's government relations activities and positions on issues. (One way the Task Force recommended this be addressed was that the Washington Affairs Representative should present a brief issue-oriented and substantive discussion of government relations issues at one of the business meetings at each year's AALL Annual Meeting. This presentation was made each year from 1994 to 2006, but when AALL switched to having just one business meeting at each Annual Meeting, the oral presentation was omitted and only a written report was submitted to the membership.)

The AALL Board did not adopt the recommendation that funds should be budgeted to support travel for those other than the Washington Affairs Representative to testify before Congress.

At the end of June, Susan Tulis concludes her 16-month temporary employment in the full-time staff position of Assistant Washington Affairs Representative and returns to University of Virginia Law Library. During the summer, a search is conducted to find a new individual to fill the position as a full-time member of the AALL staff (rather than an

Association member taking a leave from his/her position in a law library in order to do so). Mary Alice Baish, a librarian with government relations experience, is interviewed in August and offered the job. She accepts but because of commitments to her current employer, her starting date is set for early 1995.

1995—Mary Alice Baish begins her position as Assistant Washington Affairs Representative in February. In the summer, the Washington Affairs Office, through the efforts of Mary Alice Baish, launches its new web site to promote AALL advocacy activities and to inform AALL members and others of AALL policies and the issues on which the Association has commented through letters and testimony. This new site, hosted on the server of the Georgetown University Law Center, is designed to promote AALL advocacy activities and to inform AALL members and others about positions which AALL has taken on information policy issues through letters and testimony.

1996—Oakley and Baish begin registering annually as lobbyists (on advice of AALL counsel) to comply with requirements of P.L. 104-65, the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

1999—Mary Alice Baish's title is changed to Associate Washington Affairs Representative.

2000-2001—Mary Alice Baish serves as Acting Washington Affairs Representative during Bob Oakley's term as AALL President.

2006—Bryan Stevens is hired for the new position of WAO Advocacy Communications Assistant. He works for several months, but then resigns for personal reasons. The position is filled on a part-time, temporary basis from Feb. through June 2007 by AALL member Elizabeth LeDoux. The position is vacant for the next four months.

2007—In January, the WAO Online web site is migrated to AALLNET. In September, AALL is saddened by Robert Oakley's unexpected death and the sudden end of his long tenure as Washington Affairs Representative.

In November, Mary Alice Baish is appointed Acting Washington Affairs Representative. Emily Feldman is hired to fill the vacant Advocacy Communications Assistant position and begins in November, having previously served as the program associate for OpenTheGovernment.org.

2008—In February, the WAO launches AALL's Washington Blawg, a new blog to highlight issues which the Office is tracking, send out action alerts, and point out interesting articles and web sites. Members can subscribe to receive the Washington Blawg by RSS feed or by email.

Also in February, President Ann Fessenden appoints the WAO Review Special Committee (Sally Holterhoff, Chair), which is given the responsibility of assessing the evolution and current role of the Washington Affairs Office as the center of the

Association's government relations activities and of making recommendations for the future direction and continuity of those efforts.

Through the summer, the Committee uses several different methods to gather input from AALL members on their perceptions of the operation of the WAO and does research on the history of the development of the Office.

At the Fall Board meeting in October, the Executive Board considers the Committee's Interim Report and takes the following actions based on the recommendations in that report:

- Changes the name of the office to the AALL Government Relations Office (GRO).
- Establishes a full-time staff position of Director of the GRO and officially discontinues the position of Washington Affairs Representative (which had been filled by an AALL member who received an annual honorarium).
- Extends the term of the Washington Affairs Office Review Special Committee until Spring 2009.

Following these Board actions, Executive Director Kate Hagan proceeds to hire Mary Alice Baish as the first Director of the GRO.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

Leah Sandwell-Weiss, *Putting Ideals into Action: AALL Washington Affairs Office is the Hub of Law Librarianship's Government Activity*, AALL Spectrum, Apr. 2005, at 12.

[Note: This article was the winner of the 2006 AALL Spectrum Article of the Year Award.]

www.aallnet.org/products/pub_sp0504/pub_sp0504_Ideals.pdf

Timothy L. Coggins, *The American Association of Law Libraries and Its Government Relations Program* (Parts I & II), in *Law Librarianship: Historical Perspectives* 309 (Laura N. Gasaway & Michael G. Chiorazzi, eds., 1996).