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New Advocacy Toolkit for the 111th Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 9, 2009—AALL’s Government Relations Office staff regularly work with members of Congress, agencies, the administration, and the courts to promote information policy issues of importance to law libraries. While our D.C. location affords us the ability to work closely with government officials and their staff, it is *you* who has the most powerful voice in our advocacy efforts. As a law librarian and constituent, you are in a unique position to get the attention of your lawmakers and show them the need for strong information policy laws that support our profession. To help you become a successful advocate, the Government Relations Office has recently launched the new “Advocacy Toolkit for the 111th Congress,” designed to help AALL members and chapters become effective advocates for law libraries at the federal and state levels.

The Advocacy Toolkit, which is available as a live document on our Web site (www.aallnet.org/aallwash/toolkit/contents.asp) and as a PDF file, is divided into sections for individuals and chapters to help you to find the tips and tools that best suit your needs. In the first part of the toolkit, you’ll find information about the Government Relations Office and links to the many resources we provide our members and chapters, such as our Washington Blawg and monthly Washington E-Bulletin. The first section also includes our current action alerts for individuals, which makes it easy for you to make your voice heard on Capitol Hill. To help you monitor the issues we’re tracking, the toolkit includes an easy-to-read chart of the federal bills AALL supports or opposes.

A major section of the toolkit is devoted to helping chapters develop effective legislative committees so that your chapter can take action on the federal and state levels with ease. We provide tips for starting a chapter legislative committee if your chapter doesn’t already have one, as well as ways to make your legislative committee more effective if your committee is already established. The toolkit details the steps involved in influencing legislation at the federal and state levels, from tracking legislation, to finding coalition partners, to working with your member of Congress or state legislator’s staff to achieve your goals. We’ll frequently update the toolkit with new information, so we encourage you to subscribe to the RSS feed to stay on top of the latest action alerts, bills, and more.

Sen. Lieberman Champions Greater Public Access to PACER and Congressional Research Service Reports

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.), chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, has recently taken the lead on two important initiatives that AALL strongly supports. On January 27, 2009, Sen. Lieberman sent a letter to Judge Lee H. Rosenthal, chair of the judicial conference of the U.S. Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure. The letter raises questions about how the federal courts have complied with the transparency and privacy requirements of the *E-Government Act of 2002* (P.L. 107-347).

Language in the 2002 act allowed the Government Printing Office (GPO) and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AOUSC) to initiate a pilot project (now on temporary hold) allowing no-fee public access to the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) system at 17 federal depository libraries. AALL’s Executive Board endorsed the 2006 “AALL Resolution on No-Fee FDLP Access to PACER” to request that GPO and the AOUSC work together to make the PACER system available at no cost.

AALL strongly supports no-fee public access to PACER as one of our top policy goals for the coming year. In our “Statement to the Obama-Biden Transition Team: Public Policy Positions of the American Association of Law Libraries,” we outline our support for adequate annual funding to the AOUSC for no-fee public access to PACER. The document states: “It is a core principle of AALL that

information on government Web sites must be available to all people without charge. In order to provide all Americans with the same level of access to information from the federal courts as they have from Congress and federal agencies, adequate funding should be provided annually to the Administrative Office of the United States Courts to support the federal courts' important automation programs and to provide the public with no-fee access to PACER."

In his letter to Judge Rosenthal, Sen. Lieberman raises his concern that not enough efforts have been made to make PACER records freely available, as required in the 2002 *E-Government Act*. Sen. Lieberman asks Judge Rosenthal to "explain whether the Judicial Conference is complying with Section 205(e) of the *E-Government Act*, how PACER fees are determined, and whether the Judicial Conference is only charging 'to the extent necessary' for records using the PACER system."

We are also pleased that Sen. Lieberman has demonstrated his commitment to providing free online public access to reports from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS is the non-partisan public policy research arm of Congress that produces reports for members of Congress on legislative issues. In the last Congress, AALL supported a bill (S.RES.401) introduced by Sen. Lieberman to provide the public with comprehensive and free access to CRS publications online. On March 4, 2009, Sen. Lieberman sent a letter to Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), chairman of the Committee on Rules and Administration, which has jurisdiction on this issue. The letter urges Sen. Schumer and his committee to approve the creation of an automatically updated CRS clearinghouse that would offer all reports to the public. AALL applauds Sen. Lieberman for his commitment to both of these important information policy issues that will increase the public's access to government information.

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