

Washington Brief
June 2008

Congratulations to the 2008 PEGI Award Winner!

AALL has given a Public Access to Government Information (PAGI) Award since 1999 to recognize individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to protect and promote greater public access to government information. This year, the Government Relations Committee and the Awards Committee are very pleased to announce that OMB Watch, led by Executive Director Gary Bass, is the 2008 PAGI winner. OMB Watch is well deserving of this prestigious award, having spearheaded many notable projects over the past 35 years to promote greater government transparency and accountability, as well as citizen participation.

In 2006, OMB Watch created FedSpending.org (<http://fedspending.org/>), a searchable database of federal government spending. It includes information found in both the Federal Procurement Data System, which contains data about federal contracts, and the Federal Assistance Award Data System, which contains information about federal financial assistance such as grants, loans and insurance. FedSpending.org is in fact the model for USAspending.gov (<http://www.fedspending.gov/>), a database launched by the Office of Management and Budget in December 2007 as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006.

Most recently, OMB Watch launched a Regulatory Resource Center that provides educational resources for anyone interested in learning how the federal regulatory process works and tips for advocates who want to get involved in regulatory decision making. This new web site is a great resource for regulatory experts as well as those trying to understand the process (<http://www.ombwatch.org/regresources>). Congratulations to OMB Watch for winning this year's prestigious AALL Public Access to Government Information Award!

EPA Releases Report to Congress, Schedules Library Reopenings

Late last year, the FY 2008 appropriations omnibus bill (H.R. 2764) provided \$1 million for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to restore its library services across the country. The order included a direction to EPA to produce a report to the congressional appropriations committees on the actions it planned to take to reopen its libraries. This was a significant victory for AALL and other groups who had opposed these library closures since they first began in spring 2006. Firm law librarians in particular are heavy users of EPA resources and were impacted by the library closures.

EPA sent its report to the Hill on March 30. That morning, staff invited a small group of stakeholders, including AALL, for a conference call during which they summarized the report (http://www.epa.gov/natlibra/documents/Library_Report_to_Congress.pdf) and asked for our comments. The report affirms EPA's commitment to reestablish physical libraries at EPA Regions in Chicago, Dallas and Kansas City, as well as the Headquarters and Chemical libraries in DC, by September 30, 2008. The majority of the \$1 million Congress allocated will be spent on reopening the five libraries. The rest of the funds will

go to helping regional EPA libraries update their collections, facilities and equipment to meet network standards and to conducting a formal needs assessment for EPA library services to support future development. Although we were grateful that EPA briefed us on the report, many questions remain. EPA has yet to issue a final written plan on how they will proceed with their digitization efforts although they have done several studies.

Also in March, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued its long-awaited report examining EPA's reorganization plan. The report, *EPA Needs to Ensure That Best Practices and Procedures Are Followed When Making Further Changes to Its Library Network* (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08304.pdf>), is highly critical of EPA's actions prior to and during the library closures. It recommends that EPA justify its decision to reorganize its library network; improve its outreach efforts; ensure sufficient oversight and monitoring of the reorganization; and implement procedures for the proper dispersal and disposal of library materials. We fully support these recommendations and hope that EPA will continue to address these questions in the next few months leading up to the reopening of the libraries. Since December 2006, I have participated in many meetings and conversations with the GAO staff that wrote the report, and I am very pleased with its findings and recommendations.

Don't Miss the Great Policy Programs in Portland

As we look ahead to the Annual Meeting in Portland next month, Emily Feldman and I are very excited about all the policy-related programs and we hope to see you at many of them. Don't forget that on Saturday, July 12, we'll be holding our annual advocacy training from 8:30 am to noon. All AALL members are welcome to attend and there is no charge, but please RSVP immediately to Emily Feldman, AALL's Advocacy Communications Assistant, at ejf33@law.georgetown.edu if you would like attend.

There are many other policy programs, including an opportunity to get a rare, inside view of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance (FISA) Court. Program B1, "Explore the Secret Workings of the FISA Court," will take place on July 13 and feature former FISA Chief Justice Royce Lamberth. On July 14, learn how to locate hard-to-find federal executive branch materials using the Freedom of Information Act and other tools at "Flashlights, FOIA and Advocacy: Tools for the Explorer in Search of Disappearing and Restricted Federal Documents" (F1). On July 15, join us at the GRC's "Annual Legislative and Regulatory Update" (H3) to learn about the accomplishments of the GRC, the Copyright Committee and the Washington Affairs Office throughout the year. GRC Chair Scott Matheson will present the 2008 PAGI Award to our guest speaker, Gary Bass, during this program. Also on July 15, you won't want to miss "Copyright Issues in the 110th Congress" (I4) that will feature Register of Copyrights Marybeth Peters and Jonathan Band, legal counsel for the Library Copyright Alliance. They'll give us the latest news about the Orphan Works Act of 2008 and plans to implement recommendations of the Section 108 Study Group Report. You'll find a full listing of policy programs and their descriptions at: http://aallnet.org/database/meeting_annual_programs.asp.

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