Written Testimony of Ronald E. Wheeler Jr.
President of the American Association of Law Libraries
On Funding for the Government Publishing Office and Library of Congress
To the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
For the Record
May 3, 2017

Dear Chairman Yoder, Ranking Member Ryan, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of two key federal institutions funded by the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee: the Government Publishing Office (GPO) and the Library of Congress (LC). The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) works closely with these agencies to support their missions, and our members rely on their leadership in providing access to and preservation of legal information and other materials.

AALL is the only national association dedicated to the legal information profession and its professionals. Founded in 1906 on the belief that people—lawyers, judges, students, and the public—need timely access to relevant legal information to make sound legal arguments and wise legal decisions, its nearly 4,500 members are problem solvers of the highest order. AALL fosters the profession by offering its members knowledge, leadership, and community that make the whole legal system stronger.

Under the leadership of GPO Director Davita E. Vance-Cooks and Librarian of Congress Carla D. Hayden, GPO and LC are transforming themselves into modern agencies for the digital world. We urge members of the Subcommittee to support the agencies' Fiscal Year 2018 budget requests in full.

**Government Publishing Office**

The Government Publishing Office produces, authenticates, disseminates, and preserves government information in multiple formats from all three branches of government. We urge the Subcommittee to fully fund each account within GPO’s request.

The Congressional Publishing request will ensure support for the publication of Congressional materials, which law libraries use to provide access to trustworthy legal information in print and online. Some users, such as law professors, students, self-represented litigants, and members of the public prefer the print for its ease of use and the ability to skim the index and flip to specific pages. Thus, the nearly 200 law libraries in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) must continue to have the option of receiving these materials in print.

The Public Information Programs account supports the centuries’ old FDLP. FDLP libraries, including those in your districts, provide geographically convenient access to government information from all three branches of government in print and online. We are pleased with GPO's efforts to introduce greater flexibility into the depository program to allow more libraries to participate or continue their participation. As we note above, many law libraries continue to rely on GPO for distribution of specific tangible materials, especially core legal titles in print.
We appreciate GPO’s recent digitization initiatives and partnerships with the Library of Congress and National Archives and Records Administration. The digitization projects provide access to the historical Federal Register and Congressional Record, opening up a treasure for researchers and the general public. We urge the Committee to support additional digitization projects and the preservation of documents in the FDLP collection. We also commend GPO for actively participating in the House’s Bulk Data Task Force and the Committee on House Administration’s annual Legislative Data Transparency Conference.

AALL supports GPO’s request for funding for the continued development of Govinfo.gov, currently in beta. Every day, AALL members rely on access to the official, authentic government information in the new Govinfo and in the Federal Digital System (FDsys), which Govinfo will eventually replace. We appreciate the inclusive process GPO took in involving law librarians in the development of Govinfo, and our members are pleased with the new site. We also support GPO’s efforts to seek certification of FDsys/Govinfo as a Trusted Digital Repository. Once certification is complete, GPO will be first federal agency with this designation.

Library of Congress

The Library of Congress has enjoyed increased public attention this year under the leadership of new Librarian of Congress Carla D. Hayden. Thanks to Dr. Hayden’s leadership, LC is investing in its technology, digitizing historically significant collections, and updating the Library’s technology infrastructure. We strongly urge the Committee to fully fund the Library’s Fiscal Year 2018 request.

Our association was pleased to welcome new Law Librarian of Congress Jane Sánchez earlier this year. Members of AALL know Ms. Sánchez from her many years in the library community, including as director of Library Services and Content Management at GPO. We believe Ms. Sánchez is well-suited for the Law Librarian position and look forward to working with her in her new role.

The Law Library of Congress is responsible for providing access to trustworthy legal materials in print and electronic formats. Its collections are exceptional, and must be preserved. In fact, 70 percent of the Law Library’s collection is unique. We thank the Subcommittee for its support of funding for Law Library compact shelving as part of the Fiscal Year 2017 omnibus bill. The replacement of the outdated and hazardous shelving units has been a priority for both the Law Library and AALL. If the Law Library’s compact shelving is not working properly, then materials cannot be accessed and there is a greater chance of loss.

We commend LC for its development of Congress.gov. The Law Library has recently expanded the number of legal resources available via Congress.gov, and has seen a tremendous jump in traffic. AALL believes this demonstrates the public’s interest in accessing official, authoritative sources of government information. We also support the Law Library’s digitization efforts and its work to provide greater access to legal materials online.

Finally, we support the excellent work of the Congressional Research Service (CRS), and urge Congress to provide public access to its unclassified, non-confidential reports. The public has a strong interest in CRS reports. Many organizations and websites already make thousands of reports freely available online, and commercial third-party services offer the reports for a fee. The popularity of these sites demonstrates the public’s desire for access to these essential reports. Members of the public need access to up-to-date, reliable information in order to understand the
important policy issues before Congress and to participate in the democratic process. We support the oral testimonies provided by Daniel Schuman of Demand Progress and Kevin Kosar of R Street Institute before your Subcommittee today.

Conclusion

AALL thanks the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide written testimony. If we can provide additional information or assistance, please contact AALL’s Director of Government Relations Emily Feltren at efeltren@aall.org or 312.205.8010.

Sincerely,

Ronald E. Wheeler Jr.
President
American Association of Law Libraries