Oral Statement of Jean M. Wenger  
President of the American Association of Law Libraries  

On Behalf of the American Association of Law Libraries  

Before the Senate Judiciary Committee  
March 12, 2013

Chairman Raoul, Vice Chairman Mulroe, and members of the committee:

On behalf of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 1941, the Uniform Electronic Legal Material Act (UELMA). AALL strongly urges the Committee to approve UELMA, which will ensure that Illinois’ online state legal material deemed official will be preserved and made permanently available to the public in unaltered form.

I am AALL’s president and the Government Documents/Foreign & International Law Librarian at the Cook County Law Library in Chicago. AALL is a nonprofit educational organization located in Chicago with 5000 members nationwide. The Association represents over 200 members in Illinois who serve the information needs of the legal community and the public at academic, firm, state, court and county law libraries. AALL’s mission is to promote and enhance the value of law libraries, to foster law librarianship, and to provide leadership and advocacy in the field of legal information and information policy.

I would like to thank Vice Chairman Mulroe for introducing UELMA last month. This important Act addresses the urgent problem, first identified in AALL’s 2007 State-by-State Report on Authentication of Online Legal Resources, that many states are eliminating their print legal resources in favor of online-only, without assuring trustworthiness and reliability. UELMA provides an outcomes-based approach ensuring that Illinois’ online legal material is guaranteed the same level of trustworthiness traditionally provided by print publication.

As a librarian in a large public county law library, I work daily with patrons helping them to identify and access the law to protect their rights and manage their affairs. Increasingly, members of the public and the legal profession are looking to find statutes, court decisions, regulations, and other law online. Many patrons are unable to come to the library and we direct them to online sources of information. However, given the current state of online government legal information in Illinois, I must inform patrons that they cannot, for example, rely on the Illinois statutes available through the General Assembly website.

With so much inaccurate information available via the internet, citizens must have confidence in the legal texts they find at Illinois government websites. They need to know that online legal information designated as official is authentic, meaning it has not been tampered with and is the authoritative version. This can be accomplished in many ways and UELMA provides for those options. As a reference librarian, I am often asked for earlier versions of a law and, at present, the earlier versions of the Illinois statutes are not online. Citizens must also have confidence that Illinois law will be preserved online and will be permanently and publicly available.

AALL strongly urges you to support SB 1941. By adopting UELMA, Illinois will establish itself as a leader among states understanding that official, electronic legal material must be authenticated, preserved and made permanently available to the public. Thank you very much for your consideration of this important matter. I will be happy to answer any questions.