This year the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) celebrates the 30th anniversary of its government relations program and its advocacy presence in Washington, DC. Prior to 1989, AALL worked with federal departments and agencies—most notably the Library of Congress and Law Library of Congress—to make official government information more widely available to law libraries. Early in its history, the Association often joined with other professional groups, such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the American Bar Association (ABA) on policy issues of mutual interest such as copyright reform (a practice we still follow today). It wasn’t until 1989 that, upon recommendation of AALL’s Special

Looking back and ahead at the Association’s legislative priorities and efforts to ensure greater access to government information, access to justice, government transparency, balanced copyright laws, and privacy for library users.

BY TODD MELNICK
Committee on National Information Policy, that the AALL Executive Board approved a restructuring of the existing Legislation and Legal Developments Committee into the Government Relations Committee. At that time, they also appointed Robert Oakley of Georgetown University Law Library and Joanne Zich of American University’s Washington College of Law as Washington representatives for the Association. Both Oakley and Zich had prior experience preparing congressional testimony, and Oakley had testified at several hearings. In 2009, the Washington Affairs Office was renamed the Government Relations Office. During the entire 113-year history of AALL, and most especially in the last 30 years, AALL has been a national leader in the effort to ensure that the raw materials of democracy be authenticated, preserved, and widely and freely disseminated.

### AALL Lobby Day

As part of the 2019 AALL Lobby Day, AALL celebrated its 30 years of advocacy with a proclamation given by Congressman Mike Quigley in the US House of Representatives, which was printed in the Congressional Record and included in the AALL Annual Meeting program, “30 Years on the Front Lines: The Past, Present, and Future of Information Policy Advocacy at AALL.” (View the program recording at bit.ly/AM19Gov and view the Congressional Record at bit.ly/ND19record.)

AALL Lobby Day took place on Friday, July 12, 2019 before the AALL Annual Meeting & Conference in Washington, DC. Sixty members of the Association (including members of the Executive Board) from 25 states and Washington, DC, participated in the program to advocate with their federal representatives for AALL’s legislative priorities; namely: seeking co-sponsorship and support for the Electronic Court Records Reform Act (ECRRA), which would eliminate PACER’s (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) pay wall; supporting net neutrality; and ensuring full funding for the Library of Congress and Law Library of Congress.

The day began with a welcome from AALL’s 2018-2019 president, Femi Cadmus. Then Emily Feltren, AALL director of government relations, thoroughly briefed the advocates on the Association’s three legislative priorities. As chair of AALL’s Government Relations Committee, I was on hand to offer “impact stories,” or specific examples of how people would actually be affected and how their lives would be improved or rights vindicated by the policy or legislative enactment advocated.

Next, Feltren invited Bradford Fitch, president and CEO of the Congressional Management Foundation, to the podium. Fitch is an expert on effective advocacy and was brought in to help motivate the group and frame the pitches volunteers would make to their respective legislators. Fitch reinforced the personal and emotional aspects of advocacy. He told the group that advocacy is about making a connection with a legislator by demonstrating concretely with powerful and specific examples how the proposed legislation would help or harm the legislator’s constituents. Fitch helped the attendees feel confident in their ability to affect real change through one-on-one advocacy.

Following lunch, AALL members roamed the halls of Congress from one side of the Hill to the other, meeting their legislators and talking to them about the Association’s three legislative priorities. AALL 2019 Lobby Day participants attended 100 individual meetings with the offices of their members of Congress. These meetings almost immediately resulted in two new cosponsors for ECRRA and gained numerous statements of support for the Association’s legislative goals, creating relationships and pathways for future advocacy efforts. Most importantly, Lobby Day empowered 60 people to feel that they were a meaningful part of the American democratic process, dispelled any cynicism about that process they may have harbored, and inspired them to continue to make their voices heard.

### Thirty Years on the Front Lines

Capitalizing on the momentum and positive energy generated by Lobby Day, AALL’s Government Relations Committee put on a conference program Sunday, July 14, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of AALL’s legislative policy activities and to tell the story of the history of advocacy at AALL. The program, “30 Years on the Front Lines: The Past, Present, and Future of Information Policy Advocacy at AALL,” brought together three of the most active AALL leaders—Mary Alice Baish, Keith Ann Stiverson, and Sally Holterhoff—to talk about the specific ways in which AALL, its leadership, and its members worked tirelessly to foster relationships, marshal facts, and build coalitions that would ensure the free and wide dissemination of authentic government information, preserve that information for future generations, and support the entire...
In my mind, the overarching theme of both Lobby Day and the 30th Anniversary program was that advocacy is an essential component of a career in law librarianship. Furthermore, any AALL member can become an advocate without first developing a sophisticated body of knowledge or an unfamiliar set of skills.

Advocacy Is for Everyone
In my mind, the overarching theme of both Lobby Day and the 30th Anniversary program was that advocacy is an essential component of a career in law librarianship. Any AALL member can become an advocate without first developing a sophisticated body of knowledge or an unfamiliar set of skills. All that is required for successful advocacy is a willingness to connect with a legislator to talk about one’s own experiences or the experiences of one’s patrons. Advocacy, at its most effective, is a one-on-one, personal interaction between a legislator and his or her constituent. The best advocates work hard to develop an ongoing professional bond with a legislator, offer that legislator a concrete, immediate, and compelling story about how that legislator can improve the lives of his or her constituents, and provide him or her with a narrative that he or she can use to enlist other legislators in the cause. I’m not suggesting that effective advocacy is easy, but rather that it is within the usual skill set of every AALL member.

Absolutely no superpowers are required.
Some advocates—be they dentists, realtors, cardiologists, or military contractors—who work on behalf of professional organizations, need no greater motivation than to support and promote the goals of the profession that allows them to pay their bills. Others are motivated by situating themselves within a less self-serving narrative of progress and general improvement. How fortunate, then, that the professional values of law librarianship coincide with enduring democratic values such as government transparency, personal privacy, equitable access to government information, preservation and authentication of the documents of law, net neutrality, and the freedom to read. The institutions whose funding our advocacy supports—the Library of Congress, the Government Publishing Office, and the National Archives and Records Administration—are engines of information, access to justice, and democratic participation.

Take Action
If you have managed to reach this point in the article, you are ready to become an AALL Advocate. It’s as easy as joining the AALL Advocates Community on My Communities (bit.ly/AALLAdvocates). You’ll receive updates from AALL’s Government Relations Committee on news related to open government, access to government information, and privacy. You’ll also be notified of “urgent action” opportunities to contact your legislators on behalf of emergent policy initiatives. You can also read AALL’s Washington eBulletin (bit.ly/AALLeBulletin), which is sent monthly by email to

provide information about AALL’s advocacy efforts in support of the Association’s legislative agenda. You can visit the Government Relations pages on AALLNET (bit.ly/AALLadvocacy) to read about AALL’s legislative priorities for the current Congress, to read reports and issue briefs on initiatives recently or currently being considered by federal and state legislatures, and to access the Legislative Action Center (bit.ly/AALLAC), where you can take direct action on many policy initiatives with no more than a few mouse clicks. Those interested in an even deeper involvement with the Association and its legislative priorities can apply to join the Government Relations Committee or the Copyright Committee—the primary conduits through which the Government Relations Office and the AALL membership communicate with one another.

As recently described in AALL’s Body of Knowledge, advocacy is an essential component of a career in law librarianship. (Learn more about AALL’s Body of Knowledge at bit.ly/AALLBoK.) You can do it. You are the beneficiaries of an extraordinary 30-year legacy of advocacy, and your time has come. Now more than ever, our profession and our democracy depend on you, your stories, your experience, and your passion. Join us! ■

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