

INFORMATION HOSTS HOSTING PEOPLE: A VISIT TO THE 2025 AALL ANNUAL MEETING & CONFERENCE

This past July was the **118th Annual Meeting & Conference** of the American Association of Law Libraries—or, as I learned is the insider lingo, AALL or “Double A Double L.” The conference theme was *Be Bold*, a suggestion I took seriously as a first-time attendee with considerable social and travel anxiety. To bolster my nerves, I had signed up for mentorship and registered for the **Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL)**



I also researched the host city: Portland, Oregon. After too many close calls in lavatories, fitting rooms, and hospitals, my travel planning as a gender nonconforming person now includes significant research into local law.

Oregon, I confirmed, would protect my rights and medical needs if tragedy struck while away from my home in California. As I boarded my airplane departing Oakland, a reminder of this circumstantial security loomed large across the gate. A billboard, brightly lit, informed incoming travelers that only a train ride away was a facility offering abortions, gender affirming care, testing for sexually transmitted infections, and other necessary healthcare.

Arriving in Portland, I found a diverse crowd of law librarians and product representatives from throughout the country, united by a dedication to information seekers. Many came from states where my healthcare is legally prohibited, yet these new friends never failed to invite me in and create accessible community.

My mentor, hailing from Indiana, asked my pronouns before introducing me to peers. The printed schedule identified all-gender restrooms, and those restrooms were marked by large signage. My name tag was printed with the name I use daily and offered space for my pronouns. AALL had clearly done the hard work of making information-seeking—like attending a conference when you are new to the profession—a safe and encouraged endeavor.

There was much to learn in Portland, made significantly easier with these access needs already met. I dove into sessions on copyright, post-incarceration supports, and AI ethics. Between booths of the largest information corporations in the world, I discovered free, public legal resources, neuroscientists strengthening the role of medicine in court, and think tanks ensuring access to justice.

Yet the highlight of my learning was not part of the programming. Going somewhere new is hard; admitting what you do not know or that you need help accessing help is scary. These difficulties are only heightened in the high stakes, exclusionary field of law. Our role in this profession, as I learned, is to make information seeking easy, inviting, and safe.

If you are wondering how your law library can better support those you serve, consider how you might embolden these diverse information seekers. Libraries are not just repositories for information and technology. Libraries are hosts, and extending safety and protection to patrons is a critical component of the work. If it is dangerous to travel to your library, difficult to use bathrooms at your library, or upsetting to talk to your librarians, you may not be a very good host.

The Annual Meeting set a high bar for hospitality this year, with AALL choosing a safe host site, easing financial access, and making its commitments to accessibility boldly visible. Without these tangible steps, I would not have traveled beyond my front door. Instead, I arrived assured I was welcome and walked away with an important professional lesson: the information we host is only as accessible as the environment in which we host it.

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