

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON OFFICE



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RESOLUTION ON THE RIGHT TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

WHEREAS, A democratic society depends on equal, ready, timely, and equitable access to government information, regardless of format; and

WHEREAS, In the past decade, a combination of specific policy decisions, interpretations, and implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act and other statutes; OMB Circular No. A-130; and agency budget cuts have significantly limited public access to government information; and

WHEREAS, These government policies and actions have resulted in privatization and commercialization of information dissemination by government agencies, curtailment of government collection of statistics and technical data, excessive use of security classification and restrictions on access to unclassified information, restraints on scientific communication through export controls, narrow interpretations of the Freedom of Information Act, and unwarranted government secrecy; and

WHEREAS, The American Library Association has a long record of action in support of public access to information collected, compiled, produced and disseminated by the government of the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the American Library Association urge the President of the United States and Congress to take immediate action to:

- affirm a policy that ensures equal, ready, timely, and equitable access to information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, by and about the United States government;
- disseminate government information in whatever format is most appropriate, most cost effective, most timely, and most useful for government agencies, libraries, and the general public, including through an electronic gateway at the Government Printing Office;
- ensure that the government collect, compile, coordinate, maintain, and disseminate accurate and timely statistics in consistent categories to enhance the economic, educational, scientific, technological, social, and cultural welfare of the public;

- ensure that standardized, comprehensive, up-to-date bibliographic locator tools for government publications, records, and databases are widely available through nationally recognized databases and library networks, as well as in print formats, so that the public can identify needed government information;
- strengthen the Depository Library Program, particularly by including electronic formats and online access;
- ensure that government information products and services include indexes, software, and documentation needed to facilitate their usefulness;
- limit the price of government information products and services to no more than the incremental costs of distribution, and exclude the cost of collecting, organizing, storing, and preserving government information;
- prohibit copyright of all works of the United States government, and prohibit any royalty-like fees for redissemination of government information;
- recognize that electronic records are covered under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and require agencies to make reasonable efforts to provide records in the format requested;
- grant no FOIA exemption to agencies for national security, law enforcement, or financial-institution purposes unless proof is provided for demonstrable harm that outweighs the public interest in disclosure;
- impose FOIA fees only on those requestors who seek information solely for private commercial uses, and automatically grant FOIA fee waivers to libraries, educational institutions, nonprofit researchers, authors, public interest groups, and depositories of public records;
- ensure that agencies comply with the ten-day statutory response time limit for FOIA requests;
- reduce drastically the scope of secrecy within the federal government by reviewing all forms of security classification in the agencies of the government, instituting a systematic declassification system to ensure future public access, and prohibiting restrictions on public use of government information solely on the basis that it is sensitive but unclassified;
- appoint a blue ribbon commission to recommend changes in federal policies that were promulgated during the cold war and that inhibit the free flow of ideas;
- protect the privacy rights of individuals and groups from unwarranted government intrusion;
- ensure that federal information systems include provisions for archiving and eventual public access; and make special efforts to archive and preserve current electronic systems which may lack these features;

- designate federal library operations as inherently governmental functions and remove them from the OMB list of commercial activities;
- appoint federal officials who support and promote policies that ensure public access to government information—especially in the National Archives, the Office of Management and Budget Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), the Justice Department offices with jurisdiction over FOIA, and the Government Printing Office;

and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the American Library Association send copies of this resolution to William Jefferson Clinton, President of the United States, and the Members of Congress.

Adopted by the Council of the
American Library Association
Denver, Colorado
January 27, 1993
(Council Document #27.3)