

# ALA American Library Association

## RESOLUTION ON S.22, THE GOVERNMENT SECRECY REFORM ACT OF 1999

- WHEREAS,** citizens have a right to ready and equitable access to federal government information to support a thriving democracy and ensure government accountability; and
- WHEREAS,** citizens' rights to access government information must be balanced with the federal government's legitimate interest in protecting national security; and
- WHEREAS,** excessive classification erodes the credibility of government and the failure to classify endangers the nation's security; and
- WHEREAS,** the Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy found that the current system of classification and declassification was out of balance in that innocuous information is sometimes classified and information needing protection is sometimes not classified; and
- WHEREAS,** classification of federal information currently is a regulatory activity that has developed through a series of Executive Orders and lacks the discipline of a statutory framework; and
- WHEREAS,** the core objective of S. 22, the Government Secrecy Reform Act of 1999, a bipartisan bill, is to establish in statute a classification framework that includes meaningful oversight and accountability; now, therefore, be it
- RESOLVED,** that the American Library Association endorse the general statutory framework outlined in S. 22, the Government Secrecy Reform Act of 1999, and, be it further
- RESOLVED,** that the American Library Association supports S. 22., the Government Secrecy Reform Act of 1999, in that it reflects ALA policy regarding the classification of U.S. government information (ALA Council document 27.8) by;
- instituting a systematic declassification system to ensure future public access,
  - including on the Review Board independent professionals well acquainted with the security system;
  - including formal public notice and comment regarding the categories and procedures of classification and declassification to be established by the President;
  - establishing a balancing test that takes into account the public interest in release of the information;
  - ensuring that records are automatically declassified after the set time period expires;

- establishing bulk declassification procedures for older documents to hasten their release at minimal cost;
- establishing mechanisms to ensure independent review of agency classification decisions;
- ensuring that the Review Board be genuinely independent, both in structure of the organization and in the qualifications of the appointments;
- ensuring that any decision reached for declassification purposes be formed in the context of a presumption of disclosure; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the American Library Association urge that S. 22 be strengthened to rationalize secrecy classification within the federal government by:

- classifying information based on the criteria that if there is an identifiable and material harm from its release information should be classified;
- prohibiting the reclassification of government information already in the public domain;
- including formal public notice and comment regarding the development by agencies of standards and procedures for classification and declassification; and, be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the American Library Association send copies of this resolution to the sponsors of S. 22 and the appropriate committees of Congress.

Adopted by the Council of the  
American Library Association  
Philadelphia, PA  
February 3, 1999  
(Council Document 20.2)