

RESOLUTION ON RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

WHEREAS, the American Library Association has determined that its No. 1 priority is to "promote efforts to assure every individual access to needed information at the time needed;" and

WHEREAS, ALA in 1981 further confirmed its concern that there should be "free and equal public access to the data collected, compiled, produced, and published in any format by the government of these United States" (Council Document #71.2 adopted July 1981); and

WHEREAS, the present administration appears to have established a pattern of restricting access to government information, to wit:

1) The Office of Management and Budget Bulletin 81-16 resulted in massive curtailment of the executive agencies' publication of government books, pamphlets, periodicals and films, a few of which have been turned over to commercial publishers at much higher rates to the purchasers (Washington Post June 11, 1982 and CRL News June 1982);

2) Difficulties in obtaining statistical information: numerous Census Bureau studies are no longer available, and certain critical sections of the 1980 census are projected to be available only on microfiche; library and education statistics are collected and published less often at the National Center for Education Statistics; and the OMB Statistical Policy Branch, the unit which coordinated over 70 federal statistical programs has been abolished and its functions transferred to another OMB unit without adequate staff or funding;

3) Limitations on the Freedom of Information Act: The Executive Order of April 2, 1982 restricts the ability of the public to obtain the release of improperly classified government information; and pending Congressional legislation may impose further limitations (CRL News June 1982);

4) Severe restrictions have been placed by the Executive departments on the rights of the news media and of former government employees to write or speak critically of government activities (Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom January, March and May 1982);

5) Severe budget cuts for the National Archives and Records Service have resulted in reduced reference service, large processing backlogs, a halt in processing of the Nixon papers and in the declassification program, lack of service for the unique government publications archival collection at Suitland, and the elimination of interlibrary loan service by the Fort Worth Federal Archives Record Center, the main source of films of the census, diplomatic, pension and other records (Council Document #23.2 adopted January 1982), some of which restrictions have now been eased by a slight adjustment in the NARS budget; and

6) The Public Printer has implemented a policy not to offer for public sale government documents which are not expected to yield revenues of at least \$1000 in a twelve-month period; and

7) The present government is refusing to publish tax financial research studies whose conclusions it disagrees with, and refusing permission to the researchers to publish elsewhere; and

WHEREAS, it has been shown that the threatened closing of 23 Government Printing Office bookstores (Council Document #23.3 adopted January 1982) has now been postponed due to public pressure, and in other situations that sufficient public response can change the government's actions; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that ALA and its units recognize the responsibility to alert its members and the citizenry at large to the mounting threat to access to information needed for the fulfillment of the democratic process; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that ALA and its units will use all normal channels of communication, whenever possible, to alert members and the public to this increasing danger, so long as the need exists; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the ALA Public Information Office issue a press release on this resolution, to be forwarded to the President of the United States and to members of the U.S. Congress, and to be further distributed and utilized to achieve library and public awareness, as the Public Information Office may determine, within its normal budget capabilities.

Adopted by the Council of the
American Library Association
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
July 14, 1982
(Council Document #80)