

# American Library Association

## Washington Office Newsline

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### PATRIOT Act Update-- Former Library Connection "John Doe" testifies before Congress

George Christian, Executive Director of the Library Connection and former plaintiff in *John Doe v. Gonzales*, testified today (April 11, 2007) before a Senate Subcommittee on the harmful effects of receiving a National Security Letter (NSL), a component of the USA PATRIOT Act, from the FBI.

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<>Library Connection is a non-profit cooperative of 27 libraries in Connecticut. In 2005, the group received an NSL from the FBI, along with its accompanying perpetual gag order, demanding library records. This was shortly after John Ashcroft declared librarians "hysterical" with their concerns about the USA PATRIOT Act being used in libraries. Library Connection challenged the constitutionality of the NSL and its perpetual gag and eventually the FBI withdrew its appeal to keep their identities hidden after Federal District Court Judge Janet C. Hall declared the gag order unconstitutional.

Christian, spoke on behalf of himself and three others, Janet Nocek, Barbara Bailey, and Peter Chase who were equally involved.

"Ours is a cautionary story that we hope will provoke serious thought. Though our gag order was lifted, several hundred thousand other recipients of National Security Letters must carry the secret of their experience with NSLs to their graves," Christian remarked in his opening statement and further added, "When the USA PATRIOT Act was signed into law, our Connecticut library community, like the American Library Association and many other librarians, were concerned about the lack of judicial oversight as well as the secrecy associated with a number of the Act's provisions and the NSLs in particular."

Christian asked Congress "to take special note of the uses and abuses of NSLs, in libraries and bookstores and other places where higher First Amendment standards should be considered," and "to reconsider parts of the USA PATRIOT Act and in particular, the NSL powers that can needlessly subject innocent people to fishing expeditions of their personal information with no judicial review. Because of the gag order, you, our Senators and elected representatives and the American public, are denied access to the

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stories and information about these abuses. This is information you need to conduct oversight, work for appropriate changes to current law and seek to protect our constitutional rights.”

Stay tuned for an ALAWON with the full text of the testimony. For more information about this and other issues visit:

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