

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 16, 2016

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Congress
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Congress
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Graves
Chairman
Legislative Branch Subcommittee
United States Congress
HT-2, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Ranking Member
Legislative Branch Subcommittee
United States Congress
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Rogers and Graves and Ranking Members Lowey and Wasserman Schultz:

We are writing to express our disappointment in the FY2017 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill reported out of the subcommittee, which would require the Library of Congress to use the terms “aliens” and “illegal aliens” in the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

As you know, in response to public requests, including a resolution from the American Library Association, the Library of Congress convened a panel to discuss the use of the term “illegal alien” in their subject heading catalogs. Following review, the panel determined that the term “aliens” would be revised to “noncitizens” and that “illegal aliens” is pejorative and would be revised to “noncitizens” and “unauthorized immigration.”

This decision followed input from officials from different divisions of the Library of Congress as well as the Congressional Research Service. This process was conducted in a comprehensive and thoughtful manner taking into account input from the community, stakeholders and experts within the Library of Congress.

Terms and how they are defined by society change with time. As meanings of words evolve with the times, so should our usage of those terms. The Library of Congress recognizes that our nomenclature evolves, and has adjusted terms and subject headings accordingly in the past. For example, the term for African Americans has evolved several times in the last 100 years. Throughout the 1900’s, the Library of Congress used the term “Negroes”, which was then changed to “Blacks” and later to “Afro-Americans” and finally to “African Americans”.

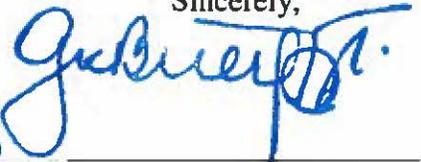
There have been similar updates to U.S. code to reflect our advancing nomenclature. For example, the law has been changed to strike terms such as “lunatic” and “mentally retarded” from statute.

Dated and dehumanizing terms such as “illegal alien” and “alien” have taken on a highly negative connotation and perpetuate the denigration of immigrant communities. The Library of Congress, the Associated Press and other media outlets have all moved to modernize these terms to be more neutral and reflective of our present day vocabulary.

It is particularly unfortunate and concerning that this provision was placed in an appropriations bill when this is a policy matter. We urge the Appropriations Committee to strike this harmful provision from the bill.

Sincerely,


Linda T. Sánchez
Chair, Congressional Hispanic
Caucus (CHC)


G.K. Butterfield
Chair, Congressional Black
Caucus (CBC)


Judy Chu
Chair, Congressional Asian
Pacific American Caucus
(CAPAC)