

RESOLUTION ON REAUTHORIZATION OF THE PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT

- WHEREAS, The American Library Association has long held that the federal government has an affirmative obligation and responsibility to disseminate government information, regardless of format, to the public; and
- WHEREAS, Access to government information is a public right and a principal function and goal of the federal government; and
- WHEREAS, Attempts to reduce the paperwork burden on the public should not result in diminished access to government information; and
- WHEREAS, The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) as implemented by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has resulted in less government information and less public access to government information; and
- WHEREAS, OMB has interpreted PRA to encourage privatization of federal information products and services to the detriment of public access to government information; and
- WHEREAS, Congress is now considering PRA reauthorization legislation (HR 3695, S. 1742) which is the result of Congressional dissatisfaction with OMB's past efforts to restrict collection and dissemination of federal information and to interfere with agency regulatory functions; and
- WHEREAS, ALA has recommended revisions to these bills to ensure equal and ready access to government information; and
- WHEREAS, Portions of the proposed legislation do promote public access to government information; and
- WHEREAS, The dissemination sections of the bills still contain provisions that would have long-term negative consequences to users of government information; and
- WHEREAS, These provisions will significantly increase the role in government information dissemination policy of the OMB, restrict dissemination and privatize government information; now, therefore, be it
- RESOLVED, That the American Library Association communicate to the sponsors of HR 3695 and S. 1742 and other members of Congress that these bills have good provisions including:

recognizing the importance of public information and the government's responsibility to ensure the flow of information to the public;

establishing the affirmative obligation of government agencies to disseminate information, regardless of format, and in ways which maximize its usefulness;

requiring agencies to provide government publications for distribution through the Depository Library Program, including the House bill's provision for publications in electronic formats;

providing greater public accountability for OMB and agency decision making;

requiring agencies to utilize the Government Printing Office (GPO) for the production and dissemination of information products and services; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the American Library Association urge the sponsors of HR 3695 and S. 1742 and other members of Congress, to amend these bills to include:

Retaining in Congress overall information dissemination authority and strengthening Congressional oversight responsibility;

Ensuring that responsibility for implementing government information policies remains with the head of each federal agency, rather than the OMB;

Guaranteeing that public access to electronic government information is provided through depository libraries;

Requiring federal agencies to disseminate government information to the public, regardless of format, complete with software, indexes and documentation needed to facilitate the usefulness and public access to government information;

Eliminating the list of restrictive factors (S. 1742, subsec. (3)(E), pp. 18-19, and HR 3695, subsec. (2)(E), pp. 12-13) required to be considered by an agency in determining how to carry out its public information dissemination functions. In particular, the fourth item on that list, requiring consideration of "equivalent" public or private information products or services, denigrates the role of the government agency and elevates the role of the private sector at the expense of the public;

Granting interested parties the right to petition agencies for review of significant changes in policy regarding information dissemination, such as that provided for in the Solid Waste Disposal Act, 42 U.S.C. 7004;

Assuring that public notice of agency plans to change dissemination policies precede any review by the OMB;

Limiting the reauthorization of the Paperwork Reduction Act to two years; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the appropriate Congressional committees and federal officials.

Adopted by the Council of the
American Library Association
Chicago, Illinois
January 10, 1990
(Council Document #60)