

FDLP Modernization Act introduced, approved by House committee

The bipartisan FDLP Modernization Act of 2018 (H.R. 5305) was introduced on March 15, following months of effort by the Committee on House Administration. The Committee approved the legislation April 12.

The bill would modernize the Federal Depository Library Program and related programs that provide public access to government information. The bill was sponsored by Committee Chairman Gregg Harper (R-Mississippi), Ranking Member Bob Brady (D-Pennsylvania), and Committee members Rodney Davis (R-Illinois), Barbara Comstock (R-Virginia), Mark Walker (R-North Carolina), Adrian Smith (R-Nebraska), Barry Loudermilk (R-Georgia), Zoe Lofgren (D-California), and Jamie Raskin (D-Maryland).

In a statement commenting on the committee's action, ALA President Jim Neal said: "Through their decades-long collaboration with the FDLP, libraries help the public find, use and understand government information. The FDLP Modernization Act will bolster that critical partnership and secure the public's right to know."

The FDLP Modernization Act was developed with input from the library community following a series of public hearings in the Committee on House Administration in 2017, which included testimony from librarians. Harper commented at the time that the hearings were an opportunity "to see how we can make something that we like, better." The bill follows that approach and incorporates many of the recommendations ALA sent to the committee.

Gavin Baker is assistant director of government relations in ALA's Washington Office, email: gbaker@alawash.org

While earlier, un-introduced drafts of the legislation dealt with a wide range of topics related to the Government Publishing Office (GPO) and government printing, the FDLP Modernization Act focuses solely on FDLP and the Superintendent of Documents' programs that provide public access to government information. Specifically, the bill would:

- modernize FDLP to provide greater flexibility, facilitate collaboration, streamline program requirements, and allow more libraries to participate;
- improve public access to electronic government information by clarifying that digital information belongs in the program, guaranteeing free access to GPO's online repository, modernizing the repository and online services, and authorizing the superintendent to digitize historical publications;
- strengthen preservation of government information by clarifying the superintendent's responsibility for preservation, establishing partnerships with libraries to preserve publications, and directing GPO to preserve publications in its online repository; and
- increase transparency and oversight to encourage the program to continue to evolve to meet the future needs of libraries and the public.

ALA welcomes the legislation and sent a letter of support, along with the American Association of Law Libraries and the Association of Research Libraries, following the bill's introduction. Prior to this process, it had been 20 years since Congress last held hearings or introduced legislation regarding FDLP.

After such a long wait, we are pleased to see bipartisan consensus that the time has come to modernize this program. ALA will continue to advocate for the bill to receive consideration on the House floor and in the Senate. *ZC*