

Advocating for Libraries' Government Information Services

Gavin Baker

I was pleased to accept editor Laura Sare's invitation to introduce myself and to encourage everyone to join in our continued advocacy for libraries' government information services. I am assistant director of government relations on ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy unit, based in ALA's Washington, DC, office. I have led ALA's work on government information policy since starting in that role in 2017.

My professional background is in public policy and advocacy related to government information. I previously worked at Common Cause, the Center for Effective Government (formerly known as OMB Watch), and the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC). I completed my M.S. in library and information studies at Florida State University and my B.A. in political science at the University of Florida.

In a nutshell, my role as an ALA staff member is to ensure we are effective in advocating for policies that support and advance the government information services that libraries provide. That work includes monitoring legislative, regulatory and agency activities; researching how policies and programs are functioning; developing ideas for changes to policies; coordinating with stakeholders, such as other library organizations; writing letters and other communications; delivering presentations; lobbying and developing relationships with decisionmakers; and engaging and mobilizing library supporters.

My role is one piece of ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy unit, which works together as a team to advance ALA's policy and advocacy priorities. The Public Policy and Advocacy unit is a new configuration of the ALA staff who formerly worked in the Office of Government Relations and the Office for Information Technology Policy, as well as the Office for Library Advocacy. Led by Associate Executive Director Kathi Kromer, we're developing new approaches to strengthen ALA's policy and advocacy work at the national, state and local levels, in support of the ALA mission: "To provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all."

Our team has one foot in the world of public policy and the other foot in the library community. We stay in constant communication with policymakers, government officials,

advocates and other stakeholders, in order to have the latest information about developments that could affect libraries. At the same time, we monitor the latest developments in libraries and seek information from library professionals and supporters in order to understand how various trends or proposals might affect libraries.

Of course, libraries are diverse, and librarians and library supporters have a wide range of perspectives and (sometimes conflicting) opinions. Consequently, we draw guidance not only from our professional judgment, but also from ALA's governance structures. As we decide whether to support or oppose a particular piece of legislation, for instance, we consider how the positions would be consistent with policy statements adopted by the ALA Council. The Committee on Legislation is the Council committee that focuses on public policy and the members of that committee can offer their advice for our work. The Committee on Legislation also establishes subcommittees when needed to focus on a particular topic, which currently includes a Government Information Subcommittee. As needed and when time and circumstances permit, we also solicit views from ALA units, such as the Government Documents Roundtable, as well as other communities of practice and leaders in the library community.

While our staff works very hard to advocate for libraries, we can't do it alone. We rely on library supporters to keep us updated about the latest developments, to build relationships with their elected officials and show them the impact that libraries make in their communities, and to speak up in support of library priorities when needed. Advocacy is a long game punctuated by sudden opportunities. We are stronger when we work together: laying the foundation through gradual relationship-building, then mobilizing when the time is right.

A great example of this is our recent success to make Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports publicly available. CRS is a federal agency, housed within the Library of Congress (LOC), that prepares public policy research for members of Congress, including reports about a range of policy topics. These reports are nonconfidential, but were not routinely published. However, after twenty years of advocacy by ALA, legislation requiring public access to CRS reports was signed into law in March 2018. As a result, LOC is now publishing these reports online at crsreports.congress.gov, and the Superintendent of Documents is adding the reports to the Catalog of Government Publications. Libraries can now provide their users with free, authentic copies of these useful public policy reports.

ALA members' support makes successes like these possible. Joining ALA or renewing your membership (including divisions or roundtables like GODORT), attending ALA

conferences, purchasing ALA publications or donating to ALA enables ALA's advocacy and other work. Reading ALA publications, newsletters and social media will keep you updated about the latest news. And by joining the ALA action center at ala.org/takeaction, you can receive alerts about opportunities to contact your members of Congress in support of legislation that strengthens libraries.

Please feel free to email me at gbaker@alawash.org with any questions or ideas—or to tell me about the latest news from your library!

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DttP Student Papers Issue



The student papers issue of *DttP* is designed to showcase the talents and interests of current library school students. Papers should focus on substantive issues in government information at all levels of government (local, state, federal, international) librarianship, including

- contemporary or historical problems related to government information access, dissemination, or preservation;
- challenges to providing reference and instructional services in public, academic, school, or government libraries;
- bibliographic control of government information;
- government efforts to promote and/or restrict access to information; and
- development of specific government programs that promote access to information.

Papers must be nominated and forwarded by a faculty member.

Required length: 2,000–3,000 words.

Please see our style guidelines at http://www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org/rt/files/content/godortcommittees/godortpublications/Instructionsforauthors_rev2018.pdf.

DttP is a professional journal. Class papers which do not conform to editorial guidelines should be reformatted to receive consideration. All papers must be submitted by September 1, 2019.

Selected papers will be printed in volume 47, issue 4 (Winter 2019).

If you are teaching a government information course or know someone who is, please contact:

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