

## Congress looks to strengthen FDLP for public access to government information

Congress' Committee on House Administration this year began examining Title 44 of the U.S. Code, which is the authority for the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and Government Publishing Office (GPO). This is an important opportunity for librarians to advocate for improvements to FDLP and public access to government information.

FDLP was designed to ensure widespread and long-term public access to information produced by the federal government. The program is managed by GPO, formerly known as the Government Printing Office, a federal government agency that publishes information on behalf of all three branches of government.

Under FDLP, participating libraries are entitled to receive a free copy of any government publication distributed by GPO. In exchange, the libraries agree to provide free public access to the publication and to retain the publication according to program rules. Currently, 1,143 libraries nationwide participate in FDLP. Academic libraries comprise 72% of the participating libraries.

Through this partnership, FDLP has delivered valuable information to the public for decades. However, many provisions of the law date to 1962 and are badly out of step with current publication, library, and information practices. As one consequence, the number of participating libraries has shrunk by 19% since 1991, as some libraries have quit the program.

With an eye to this issue, on September 26, the Committee on House Administration held a hearing to discuss FDLP—the first congressional hearing about the program in 20 years. Five librarians testified about their experiences with the program, highlighting the enduring value of FDLP and sharing their ideas for strengthening it.

Committee Chairman Rep. Gregg Harper (R-MS) described the hearing as an opportunity “to see how we can make something that we like, better.” Committee members expressed interest in working in a bipartisan fashion to develop legislation to modernize the program.

ALA has sent recommendations to the committee that emphasize three key concepts for ensuring the public's long-term access to government information:

- *Strengthen library partnerships.* The law's requirements for FDLP libraries are overly specific, and some are outdated. Congress should streamline the law to reduce unnecessary burdens and foster greater cooperation.

- *Ensure long-term preservation.* To ensure that Americans can continue to access the documents of their government in the future, Congress should codify GPO's responsibility to preserve publications in partnership with FDLP libraries.

- *Improve the collection and distribution of digital publications.* FDLP was designed for the print era. Congress should update the law to more effectively collect digital government publications and disseminate them to libraries and the public.

As of this writing, legislation to amend Title 44 has not been introduced, but is expected in the fall. ALA's Washington Office will remain engaged in the process and will notify members of opportunities to advocate for reforms that best serve libraries and the public. *RL*

---

Gavin Baker is assistant director of the Office of Government Relations, ALA's Washington Office, email: [gbaker@alawash.org](mailto:gbaker@alawash.org)