

**Written Statement of Saul Schniderman
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AFSCME Local 2910
For the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
March 7, 2014**

Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to comment on the fiscal year 2015 budget request for the Library of Congress submitted by the Librarian, Dr. James H. Billington. Our organization – the Library of Congress Professional Guild, AFSCME Local 2910 – represents over 1350 professional employees throughout the Library of Congress including Library Services, the Law Library, the Copyright Office, the Office of Strategic Initiatives which provides information technology and Web services, the Office of Support Operations, as well as the Librarian’s Office. These employees are dedicated to providing the best possible service to Congress and the American people and we wish to use this occasion to present you with some of their concerns.

The Library of Congress is the oldest federal cultural institution in the United States. As is true of all great institutions, the Library serves many communities and clients and each part of the Library contributes to the overall success of the organization. The Library serves the Congress by providing a number of vital services, including specialized library services as well as complex studies in support of legislative activities and by maintaining heavily used Web sites to provide access to legislative information. The Law Library also serves Congress and the legal community through its research and reference service in foreign, international, and American law.

The Library of Congress serves the American public in a myriad of ways, including constituents in every Congressional district. The Copyright Office sustains a national copyright registration system serving owners and users of copyrighted works. In turn, the deposit of copyrighted books, music, motion pictures, and other creative works has helped to build an unrivaled national collection which is the basis for everything else the Library does. The public uses Library collections in specialized reading rooms and, through the internet, utilizes reference services, collections, and Web casts of public programs on the Library’s Web sites. The Library serves the blind and physically handicapped through its “talking books” program. It serves the library community by providing high-quality and authoritative bibliographic records, through the operation of the gift and exchange program, and through participation by staff members at professional meetings, and many other activities. Through the Library’s preservation and outreach efforts – in print, digital, audio and moving image formats – the nation’s cultural heritage is maintained and the Library advances “the ideal of an educated democracy,” to repeat Dr. Billington’s inspiring phrase. The Library occupies a unique place in marshalling the intellectual capital needed to raise national levels of education, innovation and job growth in today’s knowledge-based economy.

While the Library of Congress has been in a leadership role, not just as a national library but as the world's largest repository of knowledge and creativity, decreasing funding has hit hard. Staffing has fallen to its lowest level in decades; cataloging, acquisitions, and some reference staffs have been reduced almost by half. There are deficits in acquisitions. We have not made sufficient progress in securing digital resources. And, in fiscal year 2013 the Library imposed a painful 3-day furlough, a sacrifice which was shared by the entire staff. Thankfully, throughout that furlough period the doors of the Library remained opened and the Library's Web sites remained up and running. Yet the Library was closed last October when our appropriations lapsed in fiscal year 2014. These have been rocky times. We are slipping and we cannot maintain the highest level of service under these circumstances.

We urge you to support the Librarian's FY 2015 budget request, with one reservation. The Guild does not support funding for the initiative which seeks to consolidate reading rooms and transform the historic Main Reading Room in the Jefferson Building into a "Center of Knowledge." We oppose funding for the reading room consolidation initiative (known as "I-900" for its 900 day timeline) because it will close reading rooms in the Adams and Madison Buildings and because it diminishes the services provided by specialized reading rooms. Regrettably, the Local History and Genealogy Reading Room was closed in 2013. The Science, Technology and Business Reading Room, and the Newspaper and Current Periodical Reading Room are slated for consolidation in 2015. The I-900 plan to consolidate collections and services will result in the homogenization of reference service and diminishment of the subject expertise which has been a hallmark of the Library for decades. Concerns about the impact of closing the Science, Technology and Business Reading Room are presented in a resolution attached at the end of our testimony.

Today the Library of Congress is in the midst of a great transition, the outcome of which is far from clear. We hail Dr. Billington's digital initiatives which many of our members are working hard to implement. But in 2014 and beyond, it is the consensus of reference librarians that closing reading rooms will degrade reference service and ultimately undermine the mission of the Library of Congress. Please listen to the Library's veteran knowledge navigators.

Keep Open the Science and Business Reading Room At the Library of Congress

WHEREAS, the Library of Congress plans to implement its “I-900 Plan” that would close the doors of the Science and Business Reading Room early in 2015, move the Science, Technology & Business Division staff and services to the Jefferson Building, and convert the Main Reading Room into the “Center of Knowledge for the 21st Century;” and,

WHEREAS, the Science and Business Reading Room, located in the Adams Building, is one of the largest and most heavily used reading rooms in the Library of Congress, with specialized reference collections and supplemental materials heavily used by researchers; and,

WHEREAS, the Library of Congress—unlike other national libraries such as the British Library—would then lack dedicated facilities for research in the sciences, technology, business, and the humanities and social sciences; and,

WHEREAS, consolidation would serve to diminish the reference collections across all disciplines, including the humanities and the social sciences, by requiring all areas to reduce their specialized collections by as much as 50 percent; and,

WHEREAS, closure of the Science and Business Reading Room would result in a significant increase in delivery time for research requests from the two-thirds of the Library’s general collections housed in the Adams Building; and,

WHEREAS, the projected homogenization of staff and merger of services would diminish the research experience by inhibiting access to subject collections for specialists and patrons; and,

WHEREAS, the consolidation would diminish or virtually eliminate dedicated physical space for collaborative research or consultation, and would limit—rather than facilitate—opportunities for cooperative outreach in science literacy and STEM education; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that we call upon Dr. James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, to:

- stop the planned merger and reduction of specialized reference collections and services;
- stop the I-900 consolidation project; and
- stop the closure of the Science and Business Reading Room at the Library of Congress.

Adopted at the March 5, 2014 meeting of the Guild Committee on Reference Service Consolidation