

**Statement of the
Library of Congress Professional Guild
AFSCME Local 2910**
Before the Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
May 1, 2002

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for providing us with this opportunity to testify and present you with our concerns. The Library of Congress Professional Guild, AFSCME Local 2910, represents over 1500 professional employees at the Library of Congress. 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 their concerns.

Traditionally, the Guild has begun its written testimony with a summary of the Library's accomplishments during the past year, and an expression of thanks to this Subcommittee for its support of the Library's budget request. This year, in light of the tragedy of September 11th and the subsequent anthrax incidents, we will begin this statement on a more circumspect note. No citizen of the United States needs a reminder of what events unfolded on September 11th and the days that followed. Last October our work place at the Library was closed for one week because of the anthrax attack, and shortly thereafter the mail was severely disrupted. During this time of stress the Congress and leaders in the Library exercised caution and care to get things moving again and preserve the vital institutions of Capitol Hill. Today, we are all very familiar that the face of Capitol Hill is greatly changed from what it was before September 11th. While we all wish to put the events of that day behind us, the Guild believes it is necessary to review the steps taken by the Library of Congress administration on Sept. 11th. We know that the leadership of every federal agency was tested that day. As a union of professional employees, we believe it our responsibility to identify and report to the Congress on life safety issues at the Library of Congress. As has been our tradition, we pledge our support, and cooperation, in making the Library a safe and secure environment for the staff and the public.

In Fiscal Year 2003, the Library of Congress requests a total budget of \$572.7 million, which includes \$536.1 million in net appropriation and \$36.6 million in authority to use receipts. This request proposes a net increase of \$56.3 million above the 2002 level. The increase includes \$46.2 million for mandatory pay and price level increases, and \$34 million for program increases, offset by \$23.9 million for non-recurring costs. We support the Library's request, with only some reservations. We are attaching a "Special Statement on the Law Library of Congress" because there are two critical issues concerning the Law Library which require particular attention: the funding of the Global Legal Information Network (GLIN) and an initiative to create a National Law Library out of the Law Library of Congress.

Mr. Chairman, the Library of Congress is the oldest Federal cultural institution in the United States, and the protection of its staff, its collections, and its historic buildings must be given the highest priority. On September 11th the institution's emergency evacuation procedures were sorely tested. On that day information and direction were slow to filter down from the Sixth Floor. The Library's problems with fire alarm, public address, and communication systems have been well-documented and – thanks, in part, to citations issued by the Office of Compliance (July 1999) and the recommendations published in their "Report on Fire Safety Inspections [of] Library of Congress Buildings" (Jan. 2001) – many of these deficiencies are in the process of being corrected. But on Sept. 11th the deficiencies became painfully apparent. Staff waited anxiously, even angrily, for some word long after Executive Branch and other Legislative Branch offices had cleared out. The Hill was spared that day and disaster was averted. Maybe fate has given us a chance – and a duty – to better prepare by addressing key elements in the Library's emergency program.

The Guild is pleased that the Safety Services Office has revised and updated emergency procedures; now we wait for this information to be communicated to the staff. Employees were issued information cards with instructions on reporting and inquiring on the status of emergencies, which is a definite step in the right direction. An evacuation plan has been developed to define responsibilities and to recruit a team of staff volunteers who will help clear the buildings. The evacuation team plan was presented to staff in a series of information sessions conducted in December and January. However, a number of staff members missed this training because they did not know it was available or because there was no support for safety training within their particular divisions. Volunteers on the evacuation teams need adequate training so that they may better understand their roles and how the plan works. Progress has been made, Mr. Chairman, on emergency planning, but the implementation of these plans is far from complete. We know now, more than ever before, that training and practice save lives – including the lives of visitors to the Library who will surely follow our lead in case of emergency. Let's practice, evaluate, and improve our emergency evacuation program at the Library of Congress.

And we wish to comment on the special access and egress problems faced by the Library's disabled staff and visitors. If the Library is to alert staff and visitors who are deaf or blind, it needs what specialists call "redundant systems" – visual alarms and audible alarms. There are very few visual alarms in Library buildings and there need to be more. Progress was made this year when deaf employees at the Library received beepers so that they could be alerted about evacuating. The beeper program was the result of years-long efforts by the LC Deaf Association, the Guild, the Labor-Management Health and Safety Committee, and the Disability Employment Program. Other challenges await attention in better assisting people with mobility impairments during emergency evacuations, especially those in wheelchairs. Institutions like the Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center, as well as the Library, are struggling with this challenge since guidelines are few and incomplete. We should all be committed to keeping the Library of Congress safe, and accessible, for everyone.

On a brighter note, we are pleased to report to the Subcommittee that the Guild and the Library have concluded negotiations over a new Collective Bargaining Agreement which will remain in effect for three years. We believe this Agreement places the Library of Congress on the cutting edge of progressive labor-management relations and will reap the Library, the staff, and the public great

returns as we enter the new Millennium. During the last two decades, great changes have occurred in the library community generally, and the Library of Congress specifically. During this period, professional staff have acquired irreplaceable skills and experience. It is imperative that an orderly transition from older workers to younger workers be established so that the Library does not lose the services of its most experienced workers prematurely through early retirement or other separation forced upon the staff member by unexpected emergencies. The new Collective Bargaining Agreement accomplishes this purpose by establishing flexible work arrangements and family-friendly programs.

While the changes adopted by the new Agreement are many, a few of the most important are easy to identify. A TeleWork Pilot Project is established, which allows management and staff to explore ways in which work can be done at off-site locations, including a staff member's home. This program is generally consistent with often stated Congressional goals of increasing telework opportunities in the federal work force. A new Voluntary Leave Bank Pilot Program, modeled after the one available in the Executive Branch, is established. The leave bank will allow staff members to protect their income during times of unexpected emergencies, and permits fortunate staff members to share their leave with less fortunate colleagues. Hours of duty are made far more flexible by expanding the hours staff members may work during the week, and making available an election of a Maxiflex Work Schedule. An Alternative Discipline Program is made part of the Agreement improving communications and interpersonal working relationships when the administration of discipline is necessary. The Leave article in the Agreement is modified to include the new family care initiatives which has recently been introduced into the federal work force.

These historic innovations, coupled with many other changes in the Agreement, could change the face of labor-management relations at the Library of Congress for years to come. The Guild looks forward to a future marked by greater labor-management understanding and cooperation, achieved through consultation and collective bargaining.

We are also pleased to report that the Transit Fare Subsidy Program at the Library is continually being improved. With the participation of hundreds of staff members in the SmartBenefits electronic transfer program, relief is in sight from the long lines of Metrochek distribution. We applaud the Library's proposed increase in transit fare subsidy benefits from \$65 to \$100 per month for eligible employees. If appropriated, Library employees will receive the same amount of transit subsidies offered by agencies in the Executive Branch of government. Our organization has always been an advocate of benefits parity for the Legislative Branch employees we represent and this increase – which, for the first time, is being proposed by the Library administration – can be viewed in this context. Of equal importance, we believe, is the fact that the Library of Congress sees itself as a responsible federal employer assisting in efforts to solve the serious traffic crisis in our region. Everyone can agree that we do not need more automobiles driven to work in the District of Columbia, especially to Capitol Hill. Since 1999, Mr. Chairman, when the Library's transit fare program was first instituted, the Subcommittee has taken a keen interest in this program. We thank you for your past, and future, support of this program.

In its FY 2003 budget proposal the Library requests 9.766 million dollars for Human Resources Services, a portion of which pays for an automated merit selection process provided by Avue

Technologies. The merit selection procedures for professional positions and other positions in the Library were modified during the past fiscal year to comply with Appendix B of the Cook Settlement Agreement. While computerization of the application process for filling vacancies appears to be sound in theory, the implementation of the software delivered by Avue Technologies has been fraught with problems, making the filling of vacancies exceedingly difficult.

When vacancies go unfilled or when classification actions dependent upon the Avue system are slow to be administered, our members suffer. There is an increasing work load on existing staff due to problems associated with the hiring of additional staff. Avue Technologies has apparently promised to fix the numerous shortcomings. The Guild hopes that they will be successful, since filling vacancies is an absolutely crucial function. If the problems are not corrected during this fiscal year, the Guild is ready to work cooperatively with Library management to put in place a system that can fulfill the human resources needs of the Library, free of subjectivity and bias in the merit selection process.

The Library's largest service unit is Library Services, which provides acquisitions, cataloging, preservation, and reference services, in addition to administering other vital public programs. There can be no doubt that the greatest challenge facing Library Services is its acute shortage of non-management, professional staff. Year after year experienced staff leave the Library through retirement or death, yet are never replaced. In many cases, these staff members are literally irreplaceable because of their outstanding language expertise and their unique technical services knowledge; they never had the opportunity to pass on their knowledge to trainees because there has been no succession planning at the Library. While we applaud Congress for the monies it has provided in recent years for technological improvements at the Library, we must state unequivocally that there simply is no substitute for fully trained, experienced professional staff.

Our staff shortage is perhaps most critical in the Cataloging Directorate of Library Services, where we have lost 205 FTE's since 1990. While cataloging was once one of the Library's crown jewels, a world-renowned operation, now we can no longer afford to perform quality cataloging because of insufficient professional staff. Acquisitions of materials continues to surge, while staff to catalog those acquisitions has plummeted. Just since the end of fiscal 1997 there has been a 16% drop in professional book cataloger staffing levels. Faced with these difficult circumstances, Library management has implemented various schemes to catalog more with less, all resulting in a deleterious effect on the quality of our cataloging product and our once pristine data base. This is a grave error because good cataloging is the foundation of good librarianship. Acquisitions and reference staff cannot adequately perform their duties when they cannot rely on the accuracy of our cataloging records. Moreover, this lack of quality has an obvious adverse impact on our patrons, including Congress. Cataloging errors can make any work, including those about weapons development in Iraq, or the political history of Afghanistan, disappear just as completely as a thief's raid on the stacks.

Last year the Cataloging Directorate did receive monies from Congress for a few new hires. However, as yet we have been unable to fill those vacancies because of technical difficulties, including problems with AVUE, the Library's automated hiring system. On a more positive note, we should remark that the Director for Cataloging has developed a new promotion plan which

clearly recognizes the importance of professional catalogers by putting them on a par with reference staff. His goal is to retain experienced staff that would otherwise transfer, retire, or leave the Library to pursue careers elsewhere. The Director has been unable to implement this plan to date because of problems with AVUE, but there is now hope that qualified catalogers may be promoted as early as this fall.

The Library seeks \$2.415 million to fund the hiring of an additional 60 Library technicians to perform serial check-in work. The Guild strongly urges that this request be funded since the additional help is urgently needed. In the request for funding the ILS system two years ago, an impression may have been created that work could be accomplished with far fewer workers, and a resulting cost savings could be achieved. This is generally untrue, and it is glaringly untrue with regard to serials check-in, which is more labor intensive than the system it replaced. In addition, the Voyager software is exceedingly difficult to operate with regard to serials. The general loss of staffing levels, coupled with the defective Voyager software with regard to serials, has led to many serials not making it to the shelves of the Library.

In the face of this genuine crisis, some managers at the Library have panicked and have proposed using acquisitions librarians whose primary responsibilities are to create orders and pay invoices to perform the technician task of serial check-in. The Guild opposes spreading the cancer affecting one area of the Library to other areas which are currently healthy. In light of the genuine crisis, the Guild proposed establishing a voluntary detail in which professional librarians could volunteer to help with serial check-in. This proposal was rejected by management. Currently, the Guild and Library management appear at odds over the proper approach.

The Library's proposal to hire an additional 60 technicians to perform serial check-in may be a sign that sensible managers have prevailed on this issue. Serials check-in has always been a technician's task. The Voyager software must be modified so technicians can perform this task, and staffing must be provided at a level necessary to accomplish this important task. Detailing professional staff away from their duties of creating orders and paying invoices is not a sound approach to address this serious problem.

The Guild requests support for the Copyright Office's total budget request of \$46.9 million, a significant portion of which will be covered by fees for service. A portion of this request will cover the services of Price Waterhouse Coopers for their assistance in helping the Copyright Office to re-engineer its business processes. In the past, many expenditures for consulting services have yielded only valueless "shelf-ware" – studies placed on a Library shelf never to be read – rather than fostering useful change at the Library. The Guild is cautiously optimistic that the current re-engineering efforts may lead to positive change at the Copyright Office because, if properly implemented, staff members will be empowered to perform at a high level. For this reason, at the mid-point of this five year re-engineering process, we have cause to hope for meaningful improvements in the services offered by the Copyright Office.

In 1998, we testified that, at the Library of Congress, "observation is one of the strongest deterrents against crime and a visible police presence is the simplest and most direct means to achieve this end." For this reason we have always voiced support for the Library of Congress Fraternal Order

of Police (FOP) who are seeking to better the working conditions of the men and women who provide safety and security to the Library staff, to the public and to the collections. At the same time we support funding requests for additional contract guards who maintain Library cloakrooms and control access to specific reading rooms.

We are disturbed, Mr. Chairman, that, for over six months LC police officers have been working 4 day / 12 hour shifts – with no end in sight. When an emergency occurs at the Library, the police are often the First Responders. When they are forced to work such long hours it is bad for the institution. Why can't the Library recruit, and retain, more trained police officers and put an end to mandatory overtime?

It was last year that we testified before you that we were concerned about how the “full security screening” of Library employees would be implemented. How would Library staff – used to having access to their workplaces by showing their ID badge – react to having to put their personal items on an x-ray machine and walk through a metal detector each morning? There were some problems – long lines, policy snafus, implementation jitters, and some frayed nerves. Looking back, it could have been worse. We agree with the Security Office that there needs to be a “staff only” line at the Independence Ave. Entrance to the Madison Building. The Architect of the Capitol should begin work immediately on the planned reconstruction necessary to affect this change. Also, entrances and exits to the Adams Building and the Jefferson Building need to be maintained with access in mind, not just security. The consultations that have taken place between the Security Office and the Library unions have proven to be productive. The Guild believes that the issue of unimpeded access to our workplace needs to stay on management’s radar screen, along with security concerns.

In closing, we believe that, overall, the Library’s budget request represents a positive vision of what will be needed to address the information needs of the Library’s constituents in the coming year. We are proud to work for the Library of Congress and we hope the Subcommittee continues its support of this great institution.

We invite you to read the accompanying “Special Statement of the Library of Congress Professional Guild on the Status of the Law Library of Congress” and to circulate it among colleagues.