



May 4, 2005

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Cornyn
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Cornyn and Leahy:

On behalf of the American Association of Law Libraries, I commend you for your leadership in promoting access to government information by introducing the *Faster FOIA Act of 2005*. We share your strong belief that accessible government information is both an essential principle of a democratic society and a valuable public good. Public inspection of government records, including electronic records, is crucial to the public's ability to participate in government and to hold it accountable.

The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) is a nonprofit educational organization with over 5000 members nationwide who respond to the legal information needs of legislators, judges, and other public officials at all levels of government, corporations and small businesses, law professors and students, attorneys, and members of the general public. Our mission is to promote and enhance the value of law libraries, to foster law librarianship and to provide leadership and advocacy in the field of legal information and information policy.

The *Faster FOIA Act of 2005* (S. 589) would create a national commission to recommend ways of addressing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) processing delays. Unfortunately, as you are both well aware, the delays by agencies in processing FOIA requests are unwarranted barriers to public access, and keep the promise of open government through the Freedom of Information Act from being realized. We fully support the establishment of a commission that could engage the public in a process to identify practical solutions to improve the federal government's response to FOIA requests. We are especially pleased that included on the panel are experts with experience using FOIA to obtain documents. Appointing highly qualified FOIA users will likely strengthen the commission's work and its ultimate recommendations. We are grateful that S. 589 requires that the study also address whether FOIA fees and fee waivers need to be reformed. The cost of a FOIA request, particularly for non-profit organizations, can be prohibitive.

AALL is very grateful to you both for your leadership since the beginning of the 109th Congress in sponsoring important bills to open the doors of government secrecy. We want to especially commend you for working together on a bipartisan basis that is all too rare in Washington today. Together, you demonstrate that the need for open government is an issue that *all* Americans regardless of their political affiliation should care deeply about. AALL proudly supports this important legislation and we look forward to working with you and your fine staff to ensure its prompt enactment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Alice Baish". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Alice Baish
American Association of Law Libraries
Associate Washington Affairs Representative