



Advocate for Your Profession

This is the third of my columns examining AALL's progress on its three strategic directions: leadership, education, and advocacy. The focus this month is on advocacy. When our strategic directions were developed in 2005, the Executive Board found that "political and commercial policies affect law libraries and librarians in almost every facet of operation." Therefore the following strategic direction was adopted:

Law librarians will influence the outcome of legal information, technology policy, and librarianship issues of concern to AALL members.

What does it mean to be an advocate? The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines an advocate as one who "argues for a cause, a supporter or defender." AALL advocates for its members in myriad ways.

Washington Affairs Office

At the heart of our efforts is the Washington Affairs Office (WAO), which promotes AALL's values by educating legislators and other government officials on the issues of vital importance to law librarians. Established in 1989, the office was headed until last September by the late Robert Oakley, Georgetown University law library director, who served as Washington affairs representative on a part-time basis. He was ably assisted by Mary Alice Baish, associate Washington affairs representative, who is a full-time employee of AALL.

Since Oakley's death, Baish and her assistant Emily Feldman, who is also an AALL employee, continue Oakley's legacy. I have recently appointed a special committee, chaired by Past President Sally Holterhoff, to review the role of the WAO and develop plans for its future direction and continuity. Other committee members include Tim Coggins, Mary Louise Hess, Keith Ann Stiverson, Maryruth Storer, Kay Todd, and Gail Warren.

The many important issues WAO has been involved in since adoption of the strategic directions include reversing the Government Printing Office's plans to eliminate print publication of key legal titles; promoting free access to federal court PACER information for federal depository libraries; securing adequate funding for the Law Library of Congress; fighting the closure of the Environmental Protection

Agency's libraries; and a variety of other activities to support open and permanent access to government information and fair and balanced copyright legislation. The WAO staff

prepares letters, position papers, and testimony for various agencies and works closely with several coalitions, including the Library Copyright Alliance and OpenTheGovernment.org.

Committees

AALL also has several committees devoted to various aspects of advocacy and government information. The Government Relations Committee works closely with the WAO to monitor legislation and inform the membership. The Copyright Committee represents members' interests regarding copyright and intellectual property and comments on proposed legislation. The Access to Electronic Legal Information Committee articulates and advances the profession's principles and values concerning public information on government Web sites, and the Citation Committee promotes citation reform and best practices. (Under our new committee structure, these two committees will soon be combined into the Electronic Legal Information Access and Citation Committee.)

Authentication of Electronic Legal Information

A recent key AALL initiative has been educating decision makers about the vital importance of authentication of electronic legal information. In 2005-2006, the Access to Electronic Legal Information Committee conducted a 50-state survey, which revealed that no state provided means to ensure that electronic legal information was authentic, even though a number of states were discontinuing some of their official print publications in favor of electronic-only formats. As a response to this disturbing discovery, then-President Sally Holterhoff convened the National Summit on Authentication of Legal Information in the Digital Age in April 2007.

A group of about 50 delegates, including leaders from the judiciary, state and federal governments, and legal organizations met to discuss these issues and to begin to seek both political and technological solutions. These efforts continue; several delegates have written articles or spoken at meetings of various legal organizations. Recently the National

Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws agreed to form a study committee on authentication, which could be the first step towards development of a model or uniform state law.

Other Advocacy Efforts

Increasingly, international policies and treaties are forming the basis for U.S. laws, especially in the area of intellectual property. Therefore, AALL works not just nationally, but also internationally, primarily by partnering with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions in order to help influence the decisions on treaties and trade agreements of the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Trade Organization, and other international policy groups.

Another type of advocacy effort AALL pursues on behalf of its members is promotion of adequate salaries for law librarians. The Economic Status of Law Librarians Committee is charged with studying law librarian compensation and pursuing ways to promote improved salaries for law librarians and works with the AALL publications director to review and update the *AALL Biennial Salary Survey*.

A third important type of advocacy is our work with legal publishers—striving for reasonable prices, improved customer service, and products that best meet the legal information needs of our users.

The Committee on Relations with Information Vendors (CRIV) focuses on helping members resolve disputes with publishers, educating members on negotiation techniques, and communicating with the membership about changes in the legal information industry. The CRIV creates and promotes tools to assist members in their interactions with vendors.

Recently the Executive Board has been closely examining our approach to vendor relations and considered some new initiatives at its April meeting. Earlier this year, we launched the AALL and Information Vendors Web page, which answers questions about such matters as vendor sponsorships, the *Price Index for Legal Publications*, and more. Watch for an upcoming *Members' Briefing* that will take an in-depth look at AALL's advocacy efforts with vendors.

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You Can be an Advocate

But advocacy isn't just something AALL's staff or leadership does; each of us needs to be an advocate for the issues that are vital to us by educating our bosses; legislators; national, state, and local officials; and our publishers' representatives. The Washington Affairs Office helps by conducting advocacy workshops each year at the Annual Meeting and issuing Action Alerts to members so that you can contact your legislators when key issues are being decided. The WAO also has an electronic newsletter and blog. You can sign up for these at the WAO's Web page, www.aallnet.org/aallwash.

You can also volunteer for one of the policy-related AALL committees or for a committee in your chapter that does similar

work at the local or regional level.

Help improve law librarians' salaries by contributing your salary information to the biennial survey. Learn about tools like the *Guide to Fair Business Practices for Legal Publishers* and the *Principles for Licensing Electronic Resources* and insist that the vendors you deal with use them as well.

Our Strategic Directions framework says, "AALL must increase its role, in all political arenas, as the unified voice of law librarians in order to help influence and shape policies that will promote continued access to and use of information." But AALL is *you!* So take an advocacy workshop, write to your legislator, or volunteer for a committee. Think about how *you* can be an advocate for the things you believe in about law librarianship. ■