Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to comment on the fiscal year 2016 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 1250 professional employees throughout the Library of Congress including Library Services, the Copyright Office, the Law Library, Information Technology Services and the Office of Strategic Initiatives, and all of the Library’s Support Operations. We appreciate the opportunity to present you with their concerns.

The American economy is a knowledge-based economy which demands high levels of education and innovation. The ability to leverage the intellectual capital in our society is becoming as important as the utilization of our natural resources or the production of commodities. Advances in medicine, science, energy, literature and the arts, telecommunications and information technology are being transformed into economic prosperity for our nation.

The Library of Congress has a pivotal role to play in this unfolding drama. We thank you for your support of the Library’s programs in fiscal year 2015 as the Library strives to meet these challenges. For this coming fiscal year we urge you to support the Librarian’s request for funding for mandatory pay-related and price level increases as well as for the relatively few program increases which are critical for the Library to function.

**Staffing.** Sequestration and flat funding in recent years have taken a toll. It can be debated whether the Library is experiencing a “retirement tsunami.” But one thing is certain – talented, seasoned Library veterans are leaving the workforce at an alarming rate, taking with them their institutional knowledge and often a life-time of experience. This exodus of career employees poses a real and growing threat which is undermining the Library’s ability to fulfill its’ mission to the Congress and the American people.

Hiring staff to fill critical vacancies is imperative to stem the erosion of the Library’s mission-critical functions. As statistical information the Guild recently compiled shows, two of the Library’s core functions have suffered crippling shortages. In 2004 there were 506 staff members in the Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access (ABA) unit of Library Services. Ten years later – in 2014 – these cataloging and acquisition librarians saw their numbers reduced to 238, a roughly 50 percent decrease. Similarly, reference services in the Library’s Collections
Services (CS) unit were supported by 313 staff members in 2004. But by 2014 their numbers were reduced to 238, almost a 25% reduction in the staff who directly serve our users. Congressional support is essential if the Library is to sustain its’ staff many of whom have highly specialized subject matter and foreign language expertise.

Too often, government institutions are characterized as being too unwieldy and too bureaucratic to quickly implement the innovations needed to address problems like staff loss. Although the Library is not immune to this criticism, I am pleased that today we can report to the Subcommittee one small, but important initiative at the Library, a one year Phased Retirement Pilot program that was negotiated with the Library’s three unions and implemented by the Library’s Human Resources Services office.

On August 8, 2014 the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) published the final rules for its’ long-awaited phased retirement program. In less than two months, the Library proposed the establishment of a Phased Retirement Pilot and was bargaining its’ implementation with the employee unions. Although the Library’s pilot is a modest one, we are pleased to note that it is the first one implemented in the federal government and it can serve as testing ground for OPM’s new program. The Guild applauds the Human Resources Services for working with the employee unions to test this program. In time, we hope it will become an important tool and benefit for both employees reaching retirement age and in assisting the Library with the transfer of knowledge from veteran staff to the next generation of employees.

**Stewardship.** The Library of Congress is well-known for having the largest and most comprehensive collection of intellectual and cultural materials in the world. The Library acquires, arranges, preserves and makes accessible book and digital collections for the Congress and the American public but where is it going to house all of these collections? Even digital resources must be housed.

Members of the Subcommittee may have heard stories of the hundreds of thousands of books on the floor or on book trucks in the Jefferson and Adams buildings. You may have seen some of the books damaged by overcrowding. It may be hard for Subcommittee members to visualize, but this overcrowding of the stacks also creates and magnifies the fire safety and life safety hazards present in those book stacks, putting the collections at greater risk as well as the employees who work in the stacks.

Our book stacks are housed on a metal grid of flooring that is very old. Unlike the regular floors in these historic buildings, the stacks provide no good barriers to the spread of fire and smoke. An old book conveyor system cuts through the floors making a path for the spread of fire. In addition, the weight of all of these books is nearing the peak load sustainable by the metal grid of flooring. These areas have no protected exit path for staff and some even lack fire doors.

As far back as 2000-2001, the Office of Compliance cited the Library and the Architect of the Capitol for these life safety and fire safety hazards and while some corrections have been made,
overloading the stacks and piling books on the floor worsens conditions in this fragile area. At least the overcrowding can be alleviated with funds for offsite storage. We also urge you to support the Architect’s request for funding to build the necessary protected exits for the Adams and Jefferson buildings.

Like Gutenberg’s printing press seven centuries ago, the advent of the Internet and advances in information technology have triggered another information revolution that affects every part of American society. All of us have witnessed the explosion of digital media and materials of all types -- e-books, e-journals, blogs, social and downloadable media in a wave that has touched and transformed how we run our homes, our government institutions, our schools, and also every other civic and social institution. Just like traditional print materials, acquiring, maintaining, providing access and preserving digital materials and digital collections, for both our current users and those in future centuries, present unique problems and challenges. A key issue is storing and access for general collection material in digital format. For the past thirty years, the Library’s programs to collect and manage digital materials in its special collections have been based in different Library units without an adequate central location to provide coordination and communication among them, but with your support that is about to change.

The Guild seeks your support for the Library’s request for funding to establish and staff a Digital Collections Center. The Library’s collection of digital materials doubles in size every few years and this rapid growth shows no sign of abating in the years to come. It is vital, both for the Library itself and the wider American and world library community, for the Library to establish this centralized platform for managing, preserving, and providing access to the vast array of digital materials that the Library collects.

Reference Service. In February it was announced that the acting Director of Collections and Services would continue in this position for two additional years. Collections and Services is the largest grouping of divisions within Library Services; the 630 employees who work there are custodial stewards for the bulk of the Library’s cultural heritage resources. Last month the Director met in an open forum with reference librarians and subject specialists asking for their help in undertaking a variety of bridge-building activities. One such task is to “represent the kind of change where the familiar strength of the past blends with the new technology to build a stronger future.” Our organization supports these efforts and, in the spirit of consultative management, hopes to join with the Director and begin a conversation with her which we hope will improve reference and research services at the Library.

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) administers a free library service to U.S. citizens who, due to organic dysfunction, are unable to read conventionally printed materials. This includes persons with blindness, low vision, macular degeneration, as well as those with physical disabilities, such as Parkinson’s Disease, Muscular Dystrophy, Cerebral Palsy, spinal cord injuries – in other words, anyone with a condition that inhibits the
handling of printed material. NLS administers this national library system for persons with print disabilities and supplies audio and braille books, magazines, and music-instructional materials via a network of libraries that includes 55 regional, 39 sub-regional libraries and 14 advisory and outreach centers serving over 500,000 patrons. Books and magazines are available in accessible audio and braille formats; books are sent on flash memory cartridges to patrons or can be downloaded directly from the BARD web site and a free digital player is provided for audio titles. Over 23 million books and magazines are circulated annually by NLS.

Due to the rapid changes in accessible technologies, improvements in delivery mechanisms, and the expansion of international library cooperation, access to materials by the print disabled community is improving. To that end, the Guild supported the staff of NLS by advocating for the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled. NLS rightly enjoys a reputation as a global leader in the provision of library service for persons with print disabilities and serves a diverse patron base that includes veterans, children, the elderly, and an ever-growing Spanish-speaking population.

We thank the committee for its continued support of this vital service which is an informational lifeline for many persons with disabilities across the U.S.

The U.S. Copyright Office. The creativity of authors in the United States is available everywhere one looks – in ebooks and print, in songs on streaming internet radio, in motion pictures, and in smartphone apps hidden in our pockets. It is no understatement to say that American creativity brings cultural and economic riches.

As the agency administering Copyright Law, the U. S. Copyright Office plays a critical role in the life of our nation. Today, elected officials, academics, and others are examining how the Copyright Office can better serve the public; strengthen its technology infrastructure, and broaden its external mission. Such a review is important and long overdue. Behind this big picture, we wish to highlight one office that is central to the Copyright Office’s mission – the Registration Program, whose employees work directly with small authors and the large copyright industry.

Copyright owners rely on registration because the Copyright Office uses it to establish a public record of copyright ownership. These public records represent a stable foundation of copyright facts that direct the use of copyrighted material and enable parties to resolve problems without litigation. Of the 476,000 copyright claims that were registered by the Office in 2014, less than 1% ended up in U.S. federal court. The copyright registration system hums because of 79 registration specialists and 7 problem resolution specialists. These individuals are the unflagging engine of the Copyright Office.

Unfortunately, the number of registration staff has diminished substantially over the last 4 years (there were 130 registration specialists in 2010). For this reason, the Guild strongly supports the budget request for increased funding to the Copyright Office. The Register of Copyrights has
assured the Guild that these are full career-ladder positions to the GS-12 level. The addition of 20 Registration Specialists comes at a critical time as work-on-hand is increasing; the electronic system remains inadequate and unfinished; and as the Copyright Office is refocusing its internal policies according to the Compendium of Copyright Office Practices, Third Edition. The Guild remains committed to improving the work environment and full professional development for registration staff.

The Guild also supports the Library’s request to add 5 FTEs in Recordation to direct the business process reengineering in that area. The office must continue its transition from a labor-intensive paper process to an effective electronic one. The Guild would like to recognize the Recordation Specialists who are already assisting in the early stages of this effort.

Office of Inclusiveness, Opportunity and Compliance. Resources for the Library’s Office of Inclusiveness, Opportunity and Compliance (OIC) are at its lowest ebb. OIC implements the Library’s Equal Employment Opportunity Program. It is responsible for the internal resolution of complaints and charges of discrimination and for assisting managers, supervisors, and employees with the resolution of other workplace disputes through mediation. The Office is a resource for identifying effective accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and it provides interpreting services for deaf and hard of hearing employees and members of the public. It provides training and analysis on diversity issues. But insufficient staffing and stature within the Library has resulted in significant delays in mediation services, providing effective accommodations, and discrimination complaint processing.

Information Technology. This past year the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has been at the Library studying the Library’s technology infrastructure. And on January 23, 2015 Dr. Billington announced that the Library will be conducting a national search for a Chief Information Officer and a Deputy Chief Information Officer. The forthcoming GAO report and the selection of a CIO is big news.

We assure the members of the Subcommittee that whatever recommendations or changes may be implemented as a result of these initiatives, they can depend upon the IT specialists at the Library of Congress to move forward with dedication, expertise and skill. While there is an air of uncertainty about the future of the Library’s IT management structure, we know that the employees who provide direct, in-house technology services and digital planning will be there for us on the front lines, thinking forward to the next challenge.

In conclusion, thank you for your continuing support for the programs and staff of The Library of Congress.

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