



NCLIS

U.S. National Commission on
Libraries and Information Science

Phone: (202) 606-9200 • Fax: (202) 606-9203
E-Mail: info@nclis.gov • Web: www.nclis.gov

1800 M Street, NW • Suite 350 North Tower
Washington, DC 20036-5841

News Release

Contact:

Information Officer

1 202 606 9200

info@nclis.gov

For Immediate Release

NCLIS Restates Position on Federal Libraries and Access to Public Information

Washington, DC USA February 5, 2007 – Beth Fitzsimmons, Chairman of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), has announced that the Commission discussed Federal libraries and access to public information held in Federal libraries at its last meeting. At the meeting, held December 11-12, 2006 in Washington, DC, the Commission addressed the issue of the closing of libraries at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and library closures and library service reductions at other Federal agencies.

At the NCLIS meeting, Vice-Chairman Bridget Lamont informed the Commission that this situation had been addressed by NCLIS before, and that in 2001 an important NCLIS report was published on the subject. In the report, *A Comprehensive Assessment of Public Information Dissemination*, the Commission took a very strong position on the role of the Federal government in assuring access to Federal government information.

“The statutory role of the Commission is to provide policy advice to the President and Congress about matters pertaining to library and information science,” said Dr. Fitzsimmons. “In her presentation to the Commission at the meeting, Vice-Chairman Lamont reminded us of our debt to previous Commissioners, and this report is an excellent case in point. This important document addresses many of the issues currently of concern in the scientific community and, particularly, in the library and information science profession. We have informed the President and Congress that this document should be re-visited, and it is the Commission’s hope that the report will provide insight and help to governing authorities as this important issue is addressed.

At the NCLIS meeting in December, the following resolution was approved by the Commission:

Resolution Recognizing the Need for Access to Information in Federal Libraries

Whereas the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) affirms that the Federal government's public information resources are a strategic national asset owned by the people, held in trust by the government, and should be permanently available to the people, except when restricted by law; and

Whereas public information resources serve a clear, broad national public policy interest by ensuring the recording, preservation, and availability of the nation's heritage as that heritage is documented by its public information resources; and

Whereas public information resources serve as a building block for the national policy of freedom of opinion and expression and enable wide, easy, and equitable public access to government information resources; and

Whereas public information resources guarantee researchers, students, parents, teachers, and businesses, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and ordinary citizens access to a comprehensive and authoritative research collection of the government's knowledge holdings; and

Whereas public information resources facilitate active and informed citizen participation in government programs and processes; and

Whereas the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Services (NCLIS) has addressed and provided recommendations on these issues in its "A Comprehensive Assessment of Public Information Dissemination" published in 2001: Now, be it therefore

Resolved, that the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) urges that prior to making any decision to close a Federal library, cut services, or dramatically restructure an agency's library system, public and Congressional input be solicited in an open process.

The Executive Summary of the Commission's report, *A Comprehensive Assessment of Public Information Dissemination*, can be seen at <http://www.nclis.gov/govt/assess/assess.execsum.pdf>. The full report is available at <http://www.nclis.gov/govt/assess/assess.html>.

ABOUT NCLIS

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) is a permanent, independent agency of the Federal government charged by Public Law 91-345 to advise the President and Congress on national and international library and information policies, to appraise and assess the adequacies and deficiencies of library and information resources and services, and to develop overall plans for meeting national library and information needs.

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