Ronald Hack
Acting Chief Information Officer
Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and
       Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office
Washington, D.C. 20231

Dear Mr. Hack:

As a patent agent and searcher for the past 25 years, I am deeply disturbed by the proposed elimination of the paper search files at the USPTO. The request for comment in the August 27, 2001 Federal Register indicates that the PTO has decided to eliminate the paper records and that the request for comments is directed at **how to** rather than **whether to** eliminate the paper files. This issue has not been decided outside the USPTO. Congress has informed to PTO that this is a policy issue to be decided not by the PTO alone but by Congress with input from all sides.

It would be a tragic error to eliminate the paper files because:

1. Computer systems go down, have software errors that "hide" data, and require training to use.
2. The public, at large, will be prohibited from coming to the PTO to search. Any WEB terminals in the searchroom? – NO.
3. The PTO collection is the only classified collection in existence. To eliminate it would be to destroy it forever. Just as the examiners' collections of foreign art and literature has been ruined by an ill-informed administration and can never be rebuilt, so will the US paper file be gone forever, an error from which we can never recover.
4. We, the public, search very differently from the Examiners at the PTO. At times, big money rides on our work. We read claims for 8 to 10 hours some days. We search for 12 hours some days. It cannot be done at a computer terminal. Many studies bear this out. Keyword searching is a small part of good patent searching. The PTO sees it as an end-all. The validity of issued patents suffers as a result.
5. It is not a matter of budget but a matter of convenience that has resulted in the possible (probable) removal of the paper files. Convenience has never been the measure of success. If the US is to remain the premiere Intellectual Property repository of the world, please do not take the easy way out. Serious searchers need the paper files to complement the undeniably valuable computer systems developed in recent years. But the computer systems are one tool, not the only tool.

I commend the PTO for its work in developing the computer systems presently deployed. I commend you more for the maintenance of the paper files for the last two hundred years. Why stop now when we have the best system on the planet to sadly end up, paperless, like everyone else?

Wait, I have an idea... why not remove all the seats in the search room and put the paper files there? Your concern for the public is admirable. Thanks.

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