



COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION

October 20, 2011

Mr. William Boarman
Public Printer of the United States
Government Printing Office
732 N. Capitol St. NW
Washington, DC 20402-0001

Ms. Mary Alice Baish
Superintendent of Documents
Government Printing Office
732 N. Capitol St. NW
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Dear Mr. Boarman and Ms. Baish:

The Library Directors of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) universities support the October 12 statement by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) regarding current Government Printing Office (GPO) positions that warrant thoughtful reconsideration. CIC libraries have enjoyed a long and fruitful partnership with the GPO to extend access to U.S. Federal Government documents to campus scholars as well as the general public of ten Midwestern states. CIC member libraries include four regional depositories (the Universities of Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and Wisconsin) and nine selective depositories—participation for most dating back to the 19th century. These libraries are deeply committed to serving the interests of the citizenry of their states and region, and rightfully proud of the substantial investments they've made to ensure that the general public has convenient access to information about the workings of the U.S. Federal Government.

As noted in the ARL statement, there is no doubt that the scholars and other public users increasingly prefer digital delivery of information—a fact borne out by the emphasis GPO itself now gives to digital delivery of current government information. While GPO has not successfully secured funding to convert older government documents from print to digital format, the CIC universities have risen to the task, investing staff time and scarce dollars to scan hundreds of thousands of volumes of the legacy print documents collection. These digital files are aggregated in the HathiTrust Digital Library, where they are made freely and openly accessible to users worldwide and archivally secured for future generations of users. This is an expensive and challenging task, but one willingly pursued by these educational institutions—both public and private— as a means of fulfilling their mission to sustain an informed citizenry. CIC institutions are investing in this digitization, as well as contributing funds to support HathiTrust, fully intending that the dividends from these investments will accrue to all.

While the CIC universities value their role as Federal Depository Library Program partners and have invested heavily to build, organize, service and preserve these government collections, they also have an obligation to their funding sources to be responsible stewards of available resources. Unnecessarily redundant commitments of staff time, space, and other campus resources cannot be ignored in this era of fiscal restraint; especially knowing that the funding source for such wasteful practices is some combination of taxpayer dollars—either through state appropriations, federally sponsored grants, or financial aid—and student/family tuition payments. On all fronts, these universities and libraries are streamlining operations, often through co-investment in collaboratively developed infrastructure or services.

Mr. William Boarman
Ms. Mary Alice Baish
Page 2

The proposal noted in the ARL statement for the University of Minnesota to support selective depository libraries in Michigan—including CIC members Michigan State University and the University of Michigan—exemplifies the kind of efficiencies that the CIC universities are seeking in any number of research and instructional programs. Our libraries have full confidence in the ability of the University of Minnesota to administer this program, and believe this approach to be more cost-effective than asking another university to bear the burdens of regional status.

Like ARL, we are surprised that GPO has not embraced the University of Minnesota's well-considered offer to extend its service area. The University of Minnesota runs an exemplary regional program—one that supports not only libraries in Minnesota but those in South Dakota as well. They have expressed a willingness to add the resources needed to extend the reach of their established program to Michigan. We think this is a workable and efficient plan that will continue the flow of government information to the people of Michigan. Without a viable alternative, GPO's resistance will visit considerable disruption and inconvenience on the people and libraries of Michigan.

Beyond the particulars of the current situation in Michigan, there is a growing sense among ARL libraries that the current organization of the Federal Depository Library Program is unsustainable. There is simply too much redundancy of content and effort, and not enough attention being given to finding ways to harness the benefits of technology and digitally formatted information to create a more cost-effective, service-oriented structure. In this age of electronic communication, there should be no doubt that satisfying "the public's right to know" could be accomplished with far fewer than 1,200 Depository Libraries.

ARL is correct that the recent messages from GPO do not suggest an openness to retooling obsolete practices, or to cooperating with the library community—and organizations like the CIC and ASERL—to overcome operational inertia and replace it with a more streamlined, technologically sophisticated, and service-oriented approach to distributing government information. We hope this airing of views will create an opportunity for GPO and the research library community to begin a serious dialog about how to best meet the public's needs going forward.

Sincerely,



Mark Sandler
Director, CIC Center for Library Initiatives

cc: CIC Library Directors
CIC Provosts
CIC Federal Relations Officers
Barbara Allen, Executive Director, CIC
Prue Adler, Association for Research Libraries