Committee Name: Government Relations Committee

Committee Charge: The Government Relations Committee monitors all federal and state legislative, regulatory, and judicial developments, with the exception of copyright, that would affect the Association, law librarianship, law libraries, or the dissemination of information, and shall advise the AALL Executive Board and the AALL Government Relations Office about these issues. The Committee informs the membership through the newsletter or other means of issues it deems important. The committee coordinates all efforts to testify or otherwise communicates Association views on information policy issues to any branch of government at any level. In furtherance of this goal, the committee may draft proposed resolutions, position papers, or letters for adoption by the Executive Board or the membership. The Committee prepares testimony or otherwise communicates Association views consistent with the Government Relations Policy to appropriate governmental bodies and other interested groups and shall keep the Executive Board informed of all such efforts. The Committee shall be responsible for the legislative update session at the annual meeting. The Committee shall consult with other AALL committees when issues handled by committee’s overlap.

Major Activities for 2010-2011:

At the 2010 Annual Meeting, the Government Relations Office (GRO) and Government Relations Committee (GRC) coordinated Legislative Advocacy Training 2010: Raising the Bar in Your State, a free workshop focused on teaching attendees how to prove to state officials the need to authenticate and preserve online legal information and convey understanding of the vital role of state public law libraries. AALL Observer to the NCCUSL Drafting Committee on the Authentication and Preservation of State Electronic Legal Materials Act, provided an update on the draft act while volunteers from state working groups shared their experiences in creating inventories of no-fee, authentic online legal information. The state of public law libraries was addressed with particular attention paid to those at-risk for budget cuts/elimination.

GRC committee members attend monthly conference calls that allow in-depth discussion of advocacy issues and activity in the political realm vital to government information policy. We also address administrative matters, plan projects, and arrange events as per the group’s charge. Said calls entail strategy development for networking with each AALL SIS and chapter. Liaisons tracked legislative activities and distributed action alerts, E-Bulletins, and additional communiqués generated by the GRO. Members and other subscribers contribute to the Advocacy listserv regularly. Threads generally center on topics like permanent public access, digital preservation and authentication of government documents/resources, net neutrality, the USA PATRIOT Act, etc. Several committee members are active in their state’s working groups, organizing work day sessions and leading similar collaborative efforts geared towards populating comprehensive legal inventories for each state.

At the Annual Meeting in Philadelphia on July 23, 2011, the GRC and GRO will host Legislative Advocacy Training 2011: Turning Challenges into Opportunities. The workshop will feature an official at the Administrative Office of the United States Courts who will discuss new PACER functionalities to help users find court information more efficiently. Leslie Street and Government Relations Committee member Julie Kimbrough will share tips on creating useful PACER research guides and developing popular PACER training programs.

Next, the Electronic Legal Information Access & Citation Committee Chair Timothy Coggins and AALL Advocacy Communications Assistant Emily Feldman will lead a discussion re: the National Inventory of Legal Materials, celebrating the significant contributions of AALL’s Federal and State Working Groups during the past year. The most recent developments regarding NCCUSL’s uniform act, Authentication and Preservation of State Electronic Legal Materials Act, will also be summarized in preparation for one of the breakout sessions.

Participants can choose between two sessions: the first on creative ways to promote digital authentication to state policymakers when NCCUSL’s uniform act rolls out in their resident states; the second to brainstorm ideas on how to sustain the role of law libraries in the Federal Depository Library Program.

More information can be found at Legislative Advocacy Training 2011: Turning Challenges into Opportunities

On July 25, 2011, D2: AALL Public Policy Update: Shining the Spotlight on Advocacy will spotlight the important work that AALL does for its members via its public policy program, as well as why and how...
AALL Committee Activities and Action Plan

members should help strengthen AALL's advocacy efforts. Advocacy Communications Assistant will moderate an interactive conversation with audience participation on AALL's top policy priorities and the past year's accomplishments. Panelists will include the Copyright Committee Chair, the Electronic Legal Information Access and Citation Committee Chair, and the Government Relations Committee Chair who will also offer perspectives on what issues will emerge in the coming year. This collaborative discussion will conclude with the presentation of the prestigious AALL Public Access to Government Information Award and Robert L. Oakley Advocacy Award.

The above activities demonstrate AALL's core values of law librarians working for a democratic society by ensuring the equitable and permanent access to legal information which can only lead to the continuous improvement in the quality justice thanks to the grassroots efforts of communities impacted by law librarians. Goal 1 (Leadership) as stated in AALL's Strategic Directions is likewise supported. (i.e. Increase and improve communication and collaboration with its entities). However, Goal III (Advocacy) is the centerpiece of the GRC's charge and, hence, the target of most of its energy. (i.e. Continue advocacy efforts to ensure the authentication and preservation of official digital legal resources; Continue to advocate that government information on government websites must be permanently available to the public at no charge).

Proposed Activities for 2011-2012:

The GRC will nurture existing relationships with legislators still in office. Following the November election, a slew of new representatives appeared in the halls of Congress, requiring we introduce ourselves and promulgate AALL's information policy to those unfamiliar with the organization's commitment to equitable, no-fee, permanent public access to authentic online legal information. Advocacy Assistant Emily Feldman has created an excellent toolkit for how to do so with the 112th Congress, a roadmap of contacts often utilized by GRC members and referred to their assigned SISs and chapters. See http://www.aallnet.org/aallwash/toolkit/112.asp and http://www.aallnet.org/aallwash/aa122010.pdf for further details.

The GRC meets on a monthly basis, with calls occurring the second Tuesday of every month from March 2011 to June 2011. The Advocacy listserv remains active. The committee's business meeting is scheduled for Sunday, July 24, 2011 at this year's Annual Meeting in Philadelphia.

The state working groups' legal inventories remain a top priority and extensive follow up to recent working group sessions is planned. GRC members reported a groundswell of interest regarding this project and will continue to push for more volunteers to join.

The GRC, along with AALL's GRO, supports the USA PATRIOT Act Sunset Extension Act of 2011 (S. 193), which would extend the three expiring provisions until December 2013 and includes a higher standard for libraries. We oppose the Internet Patriot Act (H.R. 67) prohibiting the Federal Communications Commission from further regulating the Internet and the Internet Investment, Innovation, and Competition Preservation Act (H.R. 166) which would prohibit the Federal Communications Commission from regulating information services or Internet access services without first proving there is a market failure causing harm to consumers. The GRC will also work in tandem with the GRO in opposing H.R. 514, a bill intended to extend expiring provisions of the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005 and Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 relating to access to business records, individual terrorists as agents of foreign powers, and roving wiretaps until December 8, 2011. The committee is monitoring the Stop the OverPrinting (STOP) Act (H.R. 292, S. 210), designed to eliminate the mandatory printing of bills and resolutions by the Government Printing Office for the use of the House of Representatives and Senate. Although the status of this proposed legislation is uncertain, the committee is confident it can influence their final outcome via tenacious grassroots tactics.