

ALA applauds FCC vote to protect open Internet

In late February, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to assert the strongest possible open Internet protections—banning paid prioritization and the blocking and throttling of lawful content and services. Though the FCC’s final net neutrality order language was not available at the time of this writing, statements from FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler and fellow commissioners outline several key provisions.

The order reclassifies “broadband Internet access service”—including both fixed and mobile—as a telecommunications service under Title II; asserts “bright line” rules that ban blocking or throttling of legal content, applications, and services and paid prioritization of some Internet traffic over other traffic; enhances transparency rules regarding network management and practices; and distinguishes between the public and private networks.

ALA applauds legislation for increased Wi-Fi spectrum

Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) in February reintroduced the Wi-Fi Innovation Act (S.424), which would help ensure that our nation’s libraries and their communities have access to the spectrum needed to meet growing demands for wireless access. The legislation would require the FCC to conduct a feasibility study on providing additional unlicensed spectrum in the upper 5Ghz spectrum band.

Public libraries are the most common public Wi-Fi access point for African Americans and Latinos—with roughly one-third of these communities using public library Wi-Fi. This is true for 23 percent of whites, who list school as their top public Wi-Fi spot.

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Virtually all (98 percent) public libraries now offer Wi-Fi, up from 18 percent a decade ago. Companion legislation was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congressman Bob Latta (R-OH), and cosponsored by Congressman Darrell Issa (R-CA), Congresswoman Anna G. Eshoo (D-CA), Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA), and Congresswoman Suzan DelBene (D-WA).

Sens. Reed and Cochran introduce school library bill

In January, U.S. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) joined Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Thad Cochran (R-MS) in introducing the SKILLS Act (S.312).

Key improvements to the program include expanding professional development to include digital literacy, reading, and writing instruction across all grade levels; focusing on coordination and shared planning time between teachers and librarians; and ensuring that books and materials are appropriate for students with special learning needs, including English learners. The legislation would expand federal investment in school libraries so they can continue to offer students the tools they need to develop the critical thinking, digital, and research skills necessary for success in the 21st century.

The bipartisan SKILLS Act would further amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by requiring state and school districts to address the development of effective school library programs to help students gain digital literacy skills, master the knowledge and skills in the challenging academic content standards adopted by the state, and graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

Additionally, the legislation would broaden the focus of training, professional development, and recruitment activities to include school librarians. *ZZ*