Every year state library associations join together to support the legislative concerns of the American Library Association (ALA). Delegations such as the representative assembly from the Virginia Library Association (VLA) travel to the nation’s capital for a full day of workshops followed by a day of visits to Congressional offices. This year the two-day event took place on April 23–24.

Our 2012 Virginia delegation was notable in that it included not only several librarians (the majority from the Tidewater area) but also two library school students and one patron/strong supporter of libraries. Kevin Smith, Director of York County Libraries, served as State Coordinator. During the event, we were able to visit the offices of most of Virginia’s state representatives as well as those of Senators Mark Warner and Jim Webb.

This year’s major priorities involved funding (as they typically do). ALA was supporting level funding of 184.7 million dollars—the same amount as in the previous budget—for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). Last year, the 3.7 million that came to Virginia was used by...

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the Library of Virginia to support the Office of Library Development and Find It Virginia (a collection of databases that provide Virginia library patrons with free 24/7 access to online resources).

We also lobbied for level funding for school library programs and for the Government Printing Office (which helps to ensure that the public has access to government information). Delegates also urged that future legislation include the provision that school libraries be staffed by a certified librarian. Studies have shown that there is a tremendous impact on literacy rates in elementary schools when a certified librarian is on staff. The single most predictive indicator of the future number of prison beds needed is third grade literacy rates.

Other areas of interest and concern included support for pending legislation regarding open access to government sponsored research and opposition to currently pending Cyber Security legislation. We took care to emphasize our awareness of the need for such legislation but urged careful crafting of these bills to protect Civil Liberties. Bills before Congress at this time do not provide for judicial review nor limit in any way the information Internet Service Providers can voluntarily provide the government regarding their customer’s Internet use.

I have participated in this legislative event for almost a decade now. I have always felt a sense of gratitude that we have a system of government that allows me access to my representatives to express the concerns and hopes shared by my colleagues. I have been impressed by congressional staffers’ interest in our input and pleased to discover that many are already aware of the issues.

VLA welcomes participation in this annual event and even provides some funding for travel expenses. It is a great way to support libraries and to participate in (and thus strengthen) our democratic system of government. I hope some of you will consider getting involved next year. ☞

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