June 25, 2020

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
Chairman
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: ABA Support for the FY 2021 Funding Request for the Library of Congress

Dear Chairman Hyde-Smith and Ranking Member Murphy:

On behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA), the largest voluntary association of lawyers and legal professionals in the world, I write to express our strong support for the FY 2021 budget request for the Library of Congress (LOC). As consumers of the resources of the Library and Law Library of Congress (LLOC), we cannot overstate the value of these unrivaled world class institutions to Congress, the legal profession, American business, academia, and the public. We respectfully request that you grant the LOC’s FY 2021 funding request.

In recognition of the limited resources with which your Subcommittee is working and the challenge you face in prioritizing funding requests, the LOC is requesting a modest seven percent (7%) increase for FY 2021. Cuts in past years have limited the Library and Law Library’s ability to meet the demands for services from the public, including school children, teachers, scholars, lawyers, and small business owners. While we recognize and deeply appreciate the additional support Congress provided to the LOC in FY 2020—which allowed the LLOC to hire additional legal analysts, pursue needed digitization projects, and complete replacement of the second of four quadrants of Law Library shelving—additional funding is needed in FY 2021 to offset the impact of funding cuts in prior years.

Founded by Congress in 1800 as its research arm, the Library of Congress is the oldest federal cultural institution in the nation. Over its history, the Library has grown into an unparalleled public resource of staggering proportion, housing more than 168 million items in 90 collections, including books, periodicals, films, and audio recordings. Similarly, the Law Library of Congress, authorized by Congress in 1832, has grown from its modest beginnings to become the world’s largest repository of legal materials, including more than 2.9 million legal volumes and periodicals. The Law Library supports all branches of government with complex foreign,
comparative, and international research and guidance. In addition, the executive branch’s reliance on the Law Library’s foreign law expertise is steadily increasing as are the number of requests for legal opinions from the federal agencies. Their contributions to the Congress and to the public has been on display during the pandemic, with the continued operation of services such as “Ask a librarian” and Congress.gov.

The magnitude of these priceless collections in both size and significance to our nation and to the world cannot be overstated. Their immense scope creates many unique challenges, including simply managing their daily growth and administration. These are our national treasures, and the funding required to keep the LOC and LLOC running at full capacity is a wise investment of taxpayer dollars.

The priorities identified by the Law Library for next year are important to fulfilling its mission to serve Congress and the nation effectively. These priorities include preserving hard copies of legal materials, further developing access to these materials online through digitization, and modernizing by replacing the Law Library’s third quadrant of compact shelving, which has become dangerously unusable and houses a significant portion of the world’s largest and most comprehensive collection of international, foreign, national, and comparative legal resources. LLOC priorities also address the critical area of cybersecurity to protect congressional and other high-value digital assets within the Law Library. We strongly support these priorities.

In 1932, 100 years after the founding of the Law Library and in recognition of its importance to the rule of law, the ABA formed a permanent committee – our second oldest – to serve as champions for and in support of the LLOC’s ongoing development and effective operation. From our collaboration over the years, we have come to appreciate the close interrelationship between the Library and the Law Library and the tremendous value that they both provide. Therefore, we fully support the funding request submitted for both institutions.

The ABA respectfully urges Congress to grant the LOC funding request for FY 2021. We appreciate Congress’s historical support for the Library and the Law Library of Congress and hope that you continue to find the means to protect and enhance the value of these treasures built over the past 220 years for all Americans, now and for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions about this request or the ABA’s work with the Library and Law Library of Congress, please contact Kenneth Goldsmith in our Governmental Affairs Office at (202) 662-1789 or kenneth.goldsmith@americanbar.org.

Sincerely,

Judy Perry Martinez

cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch