On March 16, 2018, the ABA-IPL’s Copyright Office Affairs Committee held its annual meeting with leadership of the U.S. Copyright Office (USCO) in Washington, DC. The meeting has occurred every year since at least the early 1990s and continues a long-standing tradition whereby USCO officials brief ABA members on litigation, legislation and regulatory developments affecting copyright stakeholders.

This year, approximately 25 ABA members and guests – including representatives from academia, in-house counsels, non-governmental organizations and private sector lawyers traveling from as far away as Texas, California, North Carolina and New York – gathered in the Register’s Conference Room. Following an ABA-sponsored lunch enjoyed by the ABA members, a conference bridge was opened that allowed additional ABA members and guests to join the meeting by telephone. Among those present for the three-and-a-half hour briefing were ABA-IPL Chair Scott Partridge, Chair Elect Mark Dickson, Copyright Division Chair Eric Schwartz, and former U.S. Register of Copyrights, The Hon. Ralph Oman.

The Acting Register of Copyrights and USCO Director, Karyn A. Temple, welcomed the group and set the stage for an informal exchange with the heads of various offices within the USCO. Chief of Operations (COO) David J. Christopher updated attendees on the development of the USCO’s new strategic plan, which – after a merger of some information technology functions between USCO and the Library of Congress – will be released in late 2018. The USCO’s Chief Financial Officer, Jody A. Harry, described an ongoing fee study and outstanding budget requests for 2018 and 2019, which, inter alia, request allocations for new examiners, digitization of historical registration and recordation records (pre-1978), relocation of the deposit storage facilities, and IT modernization. Further discussion on IT modernization, which included exchanges among attendees and USCO leadership on current technological challenges and developments, was led by Ricardo Farraj-Feijoo, Director of the USCO Copyright Modernization Office (CMO), The Office’s plans are to simultaneously maintain the existing e-CO system, and, if funded by Congress, to design and implement an entirely new electronic registration and recordation system in the next five years.

The USCO’s Director of Public Records and Repositories, Denise D. Wofford, briefed ABA members on efforts to digitize its pre-1978 registration and recordation records, (which are not currently electronic), and efforts to reduce the recordation backlog to three months before the new recordation system goes online. Following this, Robert J. Kasunic, the USCO’s Associate Register and Director of Registration Policy and Practice, and Erik Bertin, the Deputy Director, reported on the expansion and training of the corps of Copyright Examiners, as well as numerous ongoing projects, such as improving pendency times and quality review designed to update the e-CO interface. A summary of proposed bills in Congress, Copyright Office regulatory updates, and court decisions in the past year was provided by USCO Deputy General Counsel Regan Smith. Deputy Director of Policy and International Affairs Maria Strong provided a roundup of recently completed reports (e.g. Section 108 Discussion Document and the mass digitization pilot project) and ongoing studies (moral rights and section 512), interagency work in the international trade area, and hot news about legislation introduced in the Senate (S. 2559) that would amend U.S. law to implement the Marrakesh Treaty by facilitating access to printed works in accessible formats for persons with print disabilities and visual impairments. Finally, Acting Director, George Thuronyi, reported on activities undertaken by the Public Information and Education (a.k.a. “PIE”) office which he leads (and which is known within the USCO for its pie parties). The Office of PIE was instrumental in the past year in updating approximately 30 USCO circulars (which are documents intended for lawyers and laypersons alike for understanding registration, recordation, and other processes) and PIE hopes to update the remaining 30 in the year to come.

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The ABA wishes to thank USCO leadership for graciously hosting this annual meeting, and especially thanks Associate Register Kasunic, who – as he recalled to this year’s attendees – had his first contact with the USCO through this same meeting in the early-1990s. Perhaps in part because of this serendipitous introduction to his future workplace, Mr. Kasunic has in recent years taken the lead in internal agency coordination of this meeting with the ABA, and the ABA remains grateful for his efforts in continuing this tradition.