May 23, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: FY 2019 Funding for the Library of Congress

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy:

I write to express the American Bar Association’s (ABA) strong support for the Library of Congress’s FY2019 budget request. Among other things, the Library’s budget request would provide crucial funding for the Law Library of Congress, including mandatories and price-level increases throughout its operations. We were pleased to see the added support the Library received for FY2018, a worthy investment to reverse several years of reduced support. We urge your continued support for FY2019 by funding the Library of Congress’ budget request.

The ABA and its Standing Committee on the Law Library of Congress have served as a resource for Congress and the executive branch, validating the invaluable services provided by the Library of Congress and in particular the Law Library of Congress. As an association representing legal professionals, the ABA has a particularly strong interest in and expertise regarding the services offered by the Law Library, and we have enjoyed an almost 90-year relationship with the institution. We remain committed to serving as a resource for your Committee and the Congress concerning the Law Library and its efforts to serve Congress, the executive branch, the nation, and the legal profession.

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. The number of requests for legal opinions from the federal executive branch agencies in FY2017 was 40 percent higher than four years earlier.

The extent and breadth of the work performed by the Law Library cannot be overstated. The following are a few examples of requests for assistance from members of Congress or their constituents: The Law Library provided assistance on labor disputes, medical malpractice, survivor benefit plans for members of the armed forces, legislation concerning border crossing in California, landlord/tenant law, trust and estate law, marriage and child custody law, tax law, social security law, patent law, real estate law, and Affordable Health Care Act replacement, as
well as supporting congressional hearings on the airline passenger bill of rights and tracking public comments for proposed legislation.

Numerous nonprofit organizations and law firms received assistance obtaining foreign law-related information. Congressional offices requested an analysis of changes to the law in Ethiopia impacting adoptions by Americans and assistance for a California resident who had served in the Israeli Navy to determine his father’s eligibility for financial assistance from Israel. A California company requested clarification of Taiwan’s labor law granting “typhoon leave” to employees; a Maryland business owner needed power of attorney that would be recognized under Chilean law; a business owner in New Jersey requested information on the procedure to enforce a judgment in Puerto Rico; and, finally, an American with a loan transaction in France sought French regulations on consumer lending.

These examples demonstrate how the Law Library supports the stability of American families, prosperity for American business at home and abroad, and the everyday people as constituents of members of Congress. Clearly, the Library of Congress and its Law Library are important components of business development, job creation, and international relations.

Because it understands the limited resources with which your Committee is working, the Library of Congress has requested only modest increases for FY 2019, even as it makes plans to carry out its charge to maintain this unique national resource serving the Congress, the American public, and the world. We understand the tremendous challenge you face in prioritizing funding requests in this difficult budget climate. However, we must stress that 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, as well as members of the executive branch and the Congress.

The priorities identified by the Law Library for next year are important to fulfilling its mission to serve the Congress and the nation effectively, both in preserving hard copies of legal materials and in further developing access to these materials online. We strongly support them.

We respectfully urge Congress to grant the Library’s funding request for FY2019. The ABA appreciates Congress’s historical support for the Library of Congress and the Law Library. We hope that Congress will continue to find the means to protect and enhance the value of these treasures for all Americans, now and for generations to come. We would be pleased to assist your Committee with any questions you may have as to the importance of the Law Library’s work for the American justice system as a whole.

Sincerely,

Hilarie Bass

cc: Members, Senate Committee on Appropriations