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Library Services Improvement Act (1989): Correspondence 06

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Congressional Research Service
The Library of Congress

Washington, D.C. 20540

September 29, 1989

TO : House Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education
Attention: Patricia Sullivan

FROM : Wayne Riddle
Specialist in Education Finance
Education and Public Welfare Division

SUBJECT: Provisions regarding library networks in the Library
Services and Construction Act

This brief memorandum was prepared in response to your request of Sept. 26 and during the joint telephone conversation. You asked me to review an amendment to the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) that is contained in H.R. 2742, as passed by the House. The amendment adds a definition for library "network" to sec. 3 of the LSCA.¹ This definition applies primarily to LSCA title III, grants for "Interlibrary Cooperation," or resource sharing.

You expressed concern about the use of the term, "international," in H.R. 2742's definition of "network," as follows:

The term 'network' means any local, statewide, regional, interstate, or international [emphasis added] cooperative association of library entities that provide for the systematic and effective coordination of the resources of school, public, academic, and special libraries and information centers for improved supplementary services for the clientele served by each type of library entity.²

The addition of "international", as well as "statewide," are the only significant changes from the current definition of "network" in LSCA title III.

¹Sec. 3 contains definitions of general applicability to the LSCA. Under current law, the term, "network," is defined only in title III of the LSCA, which authorizes grants for library resource sharing, via networks and other means.

²Sec. 2, H.R. 2742, 101st Congress.

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Your specific concern was whether the addition of the term "international" might result in LSCA grants being made to purely "foreign" library resource networks. Assuming that "international" library networks include both domestic and foreign libraries and information centers, while "foreign" networks include only foreign entities, it would seem that this concern may be unwarranted. LSCA grants are made by the States (titles I-III) or the U.S. Department of Education (titles IV-VI) to benefit the clients of public and other libraries in the United States. Although grants may be made in certain cases to entities other than public libraries, the purpose of the grant is always to serve the (American) public. Grants would be made to any network, whether domestic or international, only if that were an effective means of serving the library needs of the State or Nation.

In addition, all of the provisions of LSCA title III clearly imply that resource sharing networks are to involve active participation by public and other libraries in the State. Thus, grants to purely "foreign" library networks would appear to be quite inconsistent with this.

Finally, a lack of reference to "international" networks in the definition might create difficulties if it were interpreted by Federal or State program officers as implying that networks with any foreign participants could not be supported under the LSCA. Many common library resource sharing networks include libraries and other organizations outside the United States. Automated bibliographic reference services--including such commercial services as Dialog, or even Federally funded bibliographic services such as ERIC--regularly obtain material from, and provide services in, the United States and several other nations. Nevertheless, we are aware of no evidence that the current lack of the term, "international," in LSCA title III has created substantial difficulties.

We hope that you find this information to be of assistance.