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NATIONAL LIBRARY GROUPS OPPOSE BILL TO MAKE REGISTER OF COPYRIGHTS A PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEE

Earlier today the leaders of the House Judiciary Committee introduced legislation entitled the “Register of Copyrights Selection and Accountability Act of 2017.” The bill would make the position of the Register of Copyrights subject to Presidential appointment and Senate confirmation. Under current law (17 USC 701), the Librarian of Congress selects the Register.

The Library Copyright Alliance, a group of national library organizations collectively representing more than 120,000 libraries in the United States and serving an estimated 200 million patrons annually, released the following statement in response:

The “Register of Copyrights Selection and Accountability Act” is mystifying. Why Congress would voluntarily cede its own confirmed Librarian’s authority to select and oversee a key Congressional advisor on copyright matters to the Executive Branch is hard to imagine.

It’s also difficult to understand how the public or Congress itself would benefit from politicization of the Register of Copyrights’ position by making it subject to presidential appointment and Senate confirmation, as this legislation proposes. Such politicization of the position necessarily would result in a Register more actively engaged in policy development than in competent management and modernization.

Politicizing the process of appointing the next Register would severely delay his or her installation. That would be poor business practice and would slow implementation of much needed technological reform. The pressing needs of the Copyright Office, which are well documented, require that a new and qualified Register be appointed as soon as possible. The many constituencies in the public and private sectors that depend on the Copyright Office simply cannot afford what could easily be a year’s delay before a new Register can take the helm were this bill to become law.

Lastly, the proposed 10-year term would lead to less accountability to Congress and the public. That contradicts the stated intent of the bill made plain in its title.

LCA thus opposes the Register of Copyrights Selection and Accountability Act and urges all members of Congress to do the same.

The Library Copyright Alliance consists of the American Library Association, the Association of College and Research Libraries, and the Association of Research Libraries.