

American Library Association Statement
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The documents released yesterday by the U.S. Department of Justice raise more questions than they answer. Although the Justice Department referenced an informal survey, the real number of libraries visited and the circumstances of those visits are still not known.

The Justice Department, however, was forced to admit in a Congressional hearing on May 20 that it had brought its expanded powers under the USA Patriot Act to bear against libraries and library users.

The American Library Association agrees with the ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (D-Michigan), that the Justice Department “could have been more forthcoming in terms of the manner in which and how freely the new powers have been used.”

This vague admission by the Justice Department reinforces the need for legislative remedy, such as HR1157, the Freedom to Read Protection Act, and S436, the Domestic Surveillance Oversight Act 2003, especially when the First Amendment protects every citizen’s right to receive information without fear of government scrutiny.

We applaud House Committee Judiciary Committee Chair James Sensenbrenner, Jr., for holding this oversight hearing and look forward to more Congressional oversight.

The American Library Association joins the Department of Justice and all Americans in its opposition to terrorism. However laws already exist to fight terrorism without the need for incursions on the civil liberties of library users and the dismantling of due process.