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**TESTIMONY OF
EMILY SHEKETOFF
ON BEHALF OF
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION**

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*Counsel for American Library
Association*

May 22, 2000

1 My name is Emily Sheketoff. I am the Associate Executive Director
2 of the American Library Association ("ALA") and manager of its
3 Washington Office. In that capacity, I direct government relations efforts
4 before Congress and the Executive Branch to fund libraries. I work on
5 initiatives important to the library community, such as youth literacy,
6 public access to government information, first amendment protection,
7 and intellectual property and copyright issues. I also oversee the policy
8 work done by the Office for Information Technology Policy ("OITP"), an
9 office that promotes the development and utilization of electronic access
10 to information as a means to ensure the public's right to a free and open
11 information society.

12 Before coming to the ALA Washington Office, I was the Budget
13 Coordinator for the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor, advising
14 labor agencies on budget initiatives, and developing institutional
15 strategies to communicate their ideas more effectively. Prior to that, as
16 Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, I ran the day-to-day
17 operations of the Government Enforcement Agency, where I created a
18 rapid response team to answer congressional inquiries.

19 My previous positions include Director of Interagency Affairs and
20 White House Liaison for the Office of Personnel Management, Deputy
21 Director for the Office of Priority Placement, Office of Presidential
22 Personnel in the Clinton Administration, and Special Assistant to the
23 Director of the White House Office of Administration in the Carter
24 Administration. In the U.S. Senate, I was a researcher and aide to
25 former Connecticut Senator Lowell P. Weicker on the Senate Watergate
26 Committee, and also served as an investigator and aide to the Staff

1 Director on the House Intelligence Committee investigating the U.S.
2 intelligence community.

3 I also served as the Washington Bureau Producer for the Monitor
4 Channel of the Christian Science Monitor, and covered the Pentagon
5 during the Gulf War. As an assignment editor with World Monitor, I
6 assigned stories to 20 reporters and 30 producers worldwide, and
7 scheduled taped pieces for broadcast, as well as producing
8 commentaries. I also worked for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
9 in its Washington Bureau and a booker and producer.

10 I hold a Bachelor's Degree in American studies from George
11 Washington University.

12 The American Library Association is the voice for America's
13 libraries. For more than a century, ALA has provided leadership
14 promoting library and information services of the highest quality, and
15 defended intellectual freedom. Most of our 59,000 members are
16 librarians, but our membership also includes trustees, libraries,
17 publishers, vendors, and other friends of libraries. ALA is a 501(c)
18 charitable and educational organization.

19 My testimony here concerns the rate increases proposed by the
20 Postal Service in this case for library rate mail. In this case, the Postal
21 Service is proposing an average increase 4.5 percent over the rates
22 implemented less than 18 months ago in Docket No. R97-1. Those rates
23 in turn represented an increase of approximately 14 percent over the
24 library rates established in Docket No. R94-1, and an increase of
25 approximately 90 percent over the library rates established in Docket No.
26 R90-1. The rate increases in Docket No. R97-1 forced the Commission

1 effectively to merge the library rate with its regular counterpart, the
2 Standard (B) "book" rate, eliminating the rate preference contemplated by
3 Congress for library rate mail.

4 The effects of these rate increases have been devastating. The
5 volume of mail entered at the library rate has plummeted, as many
6 libraries and publishers have converted to the book rate, or even to
7 commercial carriers like UPS.

8 Libraries and library programs that cannot convert to these
9 alternative modes of shipping—most notably the interlibrary loan and
10 books-by-mail programs that serve small and isolated rural
11 communities—have been especially hard hit, because postage costs
12 represent an enormous percentage of their total budget. For example, a
13 library in Martinsburg, West Virginia, has approximately 140,000
14 volumes, and does an average of 300 interlibrary loan transactions a
15 month—sending and receiving loaned books. In the last fiscal year the
16 cost of postage was nearly \$7,000. Approximately 60% of that cost, or
17 \$4,000, represented postage on interlibrary loans alone.

18 While an increase in the library postal rate will harm larger
19 libraries, the financial blow to smaller ones will be even greater. As the
20 cost of shipping books to smaller libraries increases, the larger ones will
21 have no choice but to cut back on the number of books sent to smaller
22 libraries—many of which serve poor and isolated communities that are in
23 the most need of books for education and recreation. Loretta Cecil, the
24 Mail by Book coordinator for the Southwest Kansas Library System in
25 Dodge City, Kansas, explained this in a recent letter to me:

1 "I am responsible for mailing paperback books to rural
2 and homebound readers in twelve southwest Kansas
3 counties. The Mail a Book program has been a lifeline to our
4 sparsely populated counties since 1972. Many of these
5 counties have very small libraries, with short hours of daily
6 operation. It is an understatement to say many of our
7 readers are geographically remote.

8 In recent years, the Mail-a-Book Service has been
9 dropped by two of the five systems that provided service in
10 Kansas. This is largely due to postage increases. For
11 example: In 1990 it cost an average of 45 cents to mail one
12 book. In 1999, that average cost is 96 cents. This causes
13 the entire service to suffer terribly. Book inventory is cut to
14 meet the budget restrictions, and the quality of service is
15 reduced. I feel another postal increase would create such a
16 negative effect that this rural service would be lost.

17 Perhaps the most vulnerable to increases in the library rate are
18 America's elderly, physically disabled, and other individuals with limited
19 mobility. Library programs like the interlibrary loan and "Book by Mail"
20 are a lifeline for housebound citizens. Books circulated through these
21 programs, including large print and audio books—provide vital
22 information on preventative health care, financial management,
23 eldercare, and other care-giving. Mary Bidwell, outreach facilitator for
24 the North County Library System in Watertown, New York, has written to
25 me about the impact of a postal rate hike for these programs:

26 "Outreach Services through the North Country Library
27 System (NCLS) in Watertown, New York, provides materials
28 to homebound, elderly, physically disabled, visually
29 impaired/blind, and/or deaf/hearing impaired patrons. We
30 provide large print books, audio books, closed captioned &
31 educational videos, as well as paperback or regular print
32 books. Our service area includes four counties: Jefferson,
33 Lewis, St. Lawrence and Oswego. Many areas where our
34 patrons reside are rural areas; therefore, most of the
35 material that is sent to patrons is through the postal system.

36 We provide ALL postage. When material is sent to
37 patrons, we provide the return postage. Some patrons

1 qualify for the "Free Matter" status and there is no postage
2 involved. The majority of our 575 patrons do not receive
3 materials 'Free Matter.'

4 Our Outreach budget is stretched as far as it can go:
5 Salaries, clerical supplies, materials, and postage. If there is
6 another postal increase, the money for increased postage will
7 be taken from materials. Therefore, we will be purchasing
8 less and less new materials for patrons to enjoy. If the
9 library rate is increased dramatically, the expense to send
10 materials would be so great that the materials-by-mail
11 program would suffer dramatically. In fact, NCLS might not
12 be able to continue to absorb postage costs for returning as
13 well as sending materials to Outreach patrons.

14 A recent letter from Mary Hedrick of the Harrison Regional Library
15 in Columbiana, Alabama, illustrates the human dimension of these
16 programs:

17 "[O]ur homebound patrons . . . are the most vulnerable
18 of all American citizens. The few pleasures they have are so
19 limited that each one takes on enormous importance in their
20 daily lives. The Shelby County Public Libraries Books-By
21 Mail program serves homebound Library users. Often times
22 the bags of large print books or books on tape are the only
23 contacts the patron may have with the 'outside' for days.

24 * * *

25 One of our Books-By-Mail patrons has been receiving
26 materials for over 10 years. First she needed large print
27 books, then books-on-tape. Now she receives talking books.
28 We have come to know her well and in return she depends
29 on us. She will call to find out if the weather is getting bad
30 or if we know who was injured in a local automobile
31 accident. She has no family living near. She looks forward
32 to the mail and her Books-By-Mail bag. Can we say to her
33 that we are sorry but postage costs increased and there will
34 be no more bags? Could you say that to this eighty-year-old
35 lady who worries if the bag is just one day late? She is doing
36 the best she can just to get by, how can we take away her
37 Books-By-Mail?

38 The Commission, in its recommended decision in Docket No. R97-
39 1, emphasized that its merger of library and book rates in that docket

1 was a temporary solution to the Postal Service's skyrocketing attributable
2 cost estimates, and "should not be considered a proposal to abolish
3 Library Mail as a recognized mail classification." R97-1 Opinion and
4 Recommended Decision (May 11, 1998), p. 509 ¶ 5749. During this
5 case, the Postal Service and others have proposed legislation that would
6 establish a permanent rate preference of five percent for library rate mail.
7 Enactment of the bill as law, however, will provide little solace to
8 America's libraries and their patrons if the costs attributed to library rate
9 mail—along with other parcel and flat-shaped mail—continue to outpace
10 inflation.

11 The Commission has repeatedly put the Postal Service on notice in
12 recent rate cases about the inadequacy of existing cost data for library
13 rate mail, other small mail subclasses, and other subclasses of non-letter
14 mail. For this reason, I urge the Commission to hold the Postal Service
15 to its burden of demonstrating that the costs attributed by its costing
16 systems to library rate mail will actually occur, and to reject claims of
17 increasing costs that rest merely on unreliable data or unsubstantiated
18 guesswork.

19 Library mail is "special"—different from other regular mail—
20 because of the importance that this nation puts on giving equal access to
21 books and other informational material to the public which libraries
22 serve. An unjustified postal rate hike for library rate mail would
23 effectively strip it of that "special" classification, reducing the poor,
24 elderly, homebound, disabled, and regionally isolated to second class
25 citizens in their own country, unworthy of the same opportunities and

1 privileges that others in our society enjoy. This Commission should not,
2 and need not, acquiesce in this outcome.

3 I want to thank the Commission for giving me the opportunity to
4 testify on this very important issue.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this day served the foregoing document on all participants of record in this proceeding in accordance with section 12 of the Rules of Practice.



May 22, 2000