Testimony of Judith F. Krug
for the
Commission on Child Online Protection (COPA)
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Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing. My name is

Judith Krug. I am the director of the American Library Association's Office

for Intellectual Freedom, and executive director of the Freedom to Read

Foundation. I am a librarian.

The American Library Association is the oldest and largest library

association in the world, with approximately 60,000 member librarians,

library trustees and board members, and library supporters representing

all types of libraries—public, school, academic, and state, and special

libraries serving government, business, and other institutions. ALA is the

voice of America's libraries and the millions of people who depend on

them. Its mission is to promote the highest quality library and

information services in order to ensure public access to information and

enhance learning. The Freedom to Read Foundation is a legal defense

organization, engaging only in First Amendment litigation.

The Internet is the most important advance in communications since the invention of the printing press. It is well on its way to revolutionizing the world we live in. For librarians, it provides the most exciting opportunity we have ever had to bring people and information together.

Librarians have led the way in ensuring that all people have access to this important new technology. For people without Internet access at home or work, public libraries are the number one point of access. We are extremely proud of our role in helping to bridge the "digital divide."

At the same time, we are involved members of our communities, and we too want to ensure that children, teens, and adults have a positive, and safe, online experience. In order to do this, libraries have developed, and continue to develop, a variety of Internet management techniques. A recent study, Internet Access Management in Libraries, conducted by the Library Research Center at the University of Illinois, identified several methods libraries are using to manage the Internet, including establishing Internet use policies, developing procedures for handling complaints, providing Internet education programs, designing Internet pages that link

to useful Web sites, requiring parental permission, and, in some libraries, utilizing Internet filters.

The same study confirmed the 1998 National Survey of Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity finding, that almost all public libraries (95%) offering Internet access have Internet use policies.[1] The majority of those that do not are currently developing such policies. Different communities have different information needs, and the library Internet use policies reflect those differences.

As new technologies proliferate, it is critical that we balance the extraordinary value they bring to communications and learning with responsible and careful guidance.   Librarians are on the front line, providing the training, support, and guidance that children, parents, and all library users need to become responsible Internet users.

For example, the Public Library of Nashville offers free two-hour classes called "The Internet for Parents & Children." Classes are designed for

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[1] Internet Access Management in Public Libraries found that 95% of public libraries offering Internet access have an Internet Use Policy, and the 1998 National Survey of Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity found that 97% of public libraries offering Internet access has a Use Policy.

parents and children to work in pairs at a computer, and include an introduction to the Internet, how to navigate through cyberspace, online safety, how to use the library's electronic catalog and the library's "Kid's Page," and how to find local family activities online.

The Canton (Mich.) Public Library has a "Cyber Kids" program. Parents and children must sign a Cyber Kid Agreement that explains the library's policy on Children's Internet access. Children and their parents also must attend a half hour Cyber Orientation Session, which includes an overview of the Internet and a list of "Cyber Rules." Once they have completed the session, kids receive a sticker for their library cards. This provides access to the Cyber Kids Room, where seven workstations are set up just for children.

The Worthington (Ohio) Public Library has been a central part of a community-based online safety campaign. The library developed a list of kid-friendly Web sites and prepared a book excerpt called "How Can I Judge the Quality of a Children's Internet Site?" for an Internet Safety Information Packet. The packet was distributed in a local newspaper and

at community events. The library also has made online safety information available on its Web site.

The Milwaukee Public Library produced a bookmark called "Computer Courtesies," a top ten list of things library users should remember when they use the library's computers, including signing in with staff, saving work to a floppy disk, only using programs installed on the library's computer stations and not viewing sites that may offend others.

In fact, libraries are one of the few institutions providing the general public with Internet instruction. How we provide training, support, and guidance varies somewhat depending on the community we serve. The survey, Internet Access Management in Public Libraries, found that 80 percent of respondents purposely locate computer terminals in open spaces and often near a staff person's desk, 46 percent offer Internet education classes and 64 percent require parental permission before children can access the Internet. Almost every library has an Internet use policy.

The use of filtering software is not a particularly effective way to guide children away from "questionable" material on the Internet nor is it a well-suited solution for libraries.   Libraries serve as a community's principle source of information. For many, the public library provides the only access to the vast resources available on the Internet. Many of those libraries, nearly half, have only one terminal with graphical access to the World Wide Web. To mandate that one computer be filtered would block access for library users of all ages, not just for children and youth.

Moreover, blocking software can not just target "illegal material." If not used sparingly as a tool, it deprives the entire community of access to many sites that provide valuable as well as constitutionally protected information for both adults and children on subjects ranging from AIDS and breast cancer to religion and politics. The July/August issue of Mother Jones reports Internet filters blocking its own Web site, in addition to the Web sites of Planned Parenthood, the MIT Student Association for Freedom of Expression, Remington (gun manufacturer), Filtering Facts, and the official Ally McBeal and Pokemon sites. At the same time, such software fails to provide "protection" from materials that others may find "objectionable," however defined.

When a library installs commercial filters or blocking software on all of its Internet access points, it transfers the judgment about the information needs of the community away from the local governing officials and the professional community of librarians and teachers to anonymous third parties—often part-time workers with no credentials and no ties to the community—who evaluate sites for the software filter manufacturer. Unlike software manufacturers, librarians have professional skills and are dedicated to serving their community's information needs. They have a responsibility to work with their local governing boards to help develop policies that assure appropriate Internet use.

While no one approach to Internet safety will satisfy everyone in the community, I believe it is possible to work with the community to fashion a "bottom up" approach that reflects community values, addresses core concerns, and provides useful solutions. Not surprisingly, local decision making processes vary significantly and the solutions are extremely diverse. But what they have in common is the involvement of the community, understanding of the local norms and values, knowledge of practices that take into account the information needs of teens and

children, and a general good faith desire to find a solution that respects the diverse perspectives in the community.

Librarians are concerned about "quick fixes" that fail to teach young people how to best use the Internet. Internet Use Policies combined with appropriate education are vital to the well being of our nation's children. The children of today will be net citizens for the rest of their lives. They need to be taught the skills to cope in the virtual world just as they are taught skills to cope in the physical world. Children should be educated in appropriate increments and appropriate settings on how to avoid inappropriate Internet content, to report illegal or unsafe behavior and to engage in safe interaction online. Children who are not taught these skills are not only in danger as children in a virtual world, they also will grow into young adults, college students, and an American workforce who are not capable of avoiding online fraud, Internet addictions and online stalking. Education is our best way to avoid raising a generation of victims.

The library provides a place and opportunity for children, teens, and adults to develop the skills they need to analyze information and make choices among a wide variety of competing sources.

We believe there are many alternatives to help children make wise and responsible use of the Internet. Librarians provide training for children, parents, and teachers on appropriate Internet use. Almost all libraries have established local Internet use policies for children and other library users, which set rules for appropriate behavior in libraries or schools when using online resources. Librarians provide guidance on how to assess the value and reliability of Internet resources.

The American Library Association, for example, has developed "FamiliesConnect, " which provides online classes developed by the American Association of School Librarians, and teaches Internet basics and safety, as well as recommends how to make the most of Internet resources.

The Fort Vancouver Regional Library District (Wash.) gives library users the choice of filtered or unfiltered Internet access. Parents who have

their child's library card can make this choice for their own child.   The use of technology in this instance does not undermine the library's role, but supports it by once again providing users with choice.

Most importantly, librarians assure safe and positive online experiences for children, based upon each child's needs, by guiding them to educational, entertaining, and valuable sites. In addition to providing direct advice and guidance to children seeking to research particular topics or find certain information, many individual libraries, as well as the American Library Association, have developed children's Web sites and home pages that lead children directly to the best the Internet has to offer. For example, the ALA has developed "700+ Amazing, Spectacular, Mysterious, Wonderful Web Sites for Kids and the Adults Who Care About Them" to guide parents and children to sites that are safe, educational, and entertaining.

The Johnson County (Kans.) Library produces a "Super Sites of the Month" flyer as part of its Kids' Page. These kid-friendly sites are recommended by library staff.

The San Jose (Calif.) Public Library has made its Youth Services Page the homepage for Internet access workstations in the children's area.

Librarians must be permitted to meet the needs of their communities—both for access to information, and for a positive online experience—with the greatest possible flexibility. Librarians, together with their communities, are choosing the best tools and methods available to them to ensure safe Internet access. A government-imposed mandate would deny communities the flexibility they need to reevaluate those tools over time, and to make adjustments as circumstances change.

Librarians understand that increased access to the Internet in schools and libraries has heightened concern about children's ability to access inappropriate and illegal material. We share those concerns, which are serious, but not new. Communities have been developing many different and effective ways to guide children's access that are constitutionally sound and also informed by professional research and judgment and local norms and values. The government should not interfere with local control

and decision making by mandating a single approach to a multifaceted

problem. There is no one right solution, there are many.