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## Georgia Library Association - Advocacy Committee

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## **Georgia Library Association Advocacy Committee**

The Georgia Library Association (GLA) has long had a committee focused on the work and actions of both the state and federal government. The GLA Handbook states that the name of the Federal Relations Committee was changed to Governmental Relations in 1967. The goal is to stay informed of the political process, identifying the ways it intersects with our work as librarians.

GALILEO is a prime example, having made its debut on September 21, 1995, just 150 days after then Governor Zell Miller and the Georgia General Assembly approved funding.

Over the years, GLA has been involved in many legislative efforts, including our annual Library Day at the Georgia Capitol. Like many things, this event has evolved over time. Instead of inviting legislators to a plated lunch during session, GLA now partners with the Georgia Council of Public Library to provide dessert to their always-popular Public Library Day, which is catered by the Varsity. GLA also coordinated the distribution of an art print by Debi Davis to our state legislators. Originally sponsored by the now-closed Mumford Books, these prints are beloved and often framed and on display in their offices at the Capitol. This separate event gives library supporters another chance to see and be seen during the legislative session.

Each year, public libraries actively petition the Georgia General Assembly for materials and building funds. There are more local struggles that libraries of all types face, and there have

been bigger issues as well, which have seemingly pulled libraries in as bystanders to larger, more partisan debates.

At the national level, GLA has sponsored a board member's attendance to the American Library Association (ALA) National Library Legislative Day events in Washington, D.C. This two-day event includes a briefing from the ALA Washington Office on the national legislation affecting libraries and a day of visiting Georgia's Congressional Delegation.



Through it all, GLA has strived to build relationships with legislators and broadly share information on the outcome and impact of their decisions. Recently it became clear that the name of the committee,

while very descriptive, did not fully incorporate the work of the group. In 2016, the Governmental Relations Committee began looking for a new name, and now it's official: the Governmental Relations Committee is now the Advocacy Committee.

Defined as the action of advocating, pleading for, or supporting a cause or proposal, advocacy is the process of building relationships over time and speaks to the long-term investment and strategy involved with this work. Advocacy efforts give us a chance to inform funders about the ways libraries have evolved over time.

Libraries have never been dusty book warehouses. They are learning centers and a place for students of any age and any topic to gain knowledge. As libraries continue to embrace new technologies and service models, we need the support of leaders and funders to

keep meeting the needs of our patrons. It is often our patrons who can make the case for more funding.

There are many examples and best practices from other state library associations. Our neighbors in North Carolina have an annual contest to find their student ambassador, who accompanies the state's delegation to ALA's

National Library Legislative Day. ([See this ALA blog post for more information.](#)) This gives library funders a true sense of the impact of libraries in the lives of these students.

The GLA Advocacy Committee looks forward to working with all GLA divisions, interest groups, and committees.