

Privacy Statement Relating to the USA PATRIOT Act

The USA PATRIOT Act, or "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act," was enacted October 26, 2001. The Act amends over 15 federal statutes including criminal procedures, computer fraud and abuse, foreign intelligence, wiretapping, immigration, and the privacy of student records. These amendments increase FBI and law enforcement authority to gain access to business records, medical records, educational records and library records, including stored electronic data and communications. They also expand the laws governing wiretaps and "trap and trace" phone devices to Internet and electronic communications.

As citizens, librarians understand the importance of maintaining national security and public safety, and recognize that law enforcement agencies and officers may occasionally believe that library records contain information which would be helpful to the investigation of acts of terrorism or threats to the security of our nation. If there is a reasonable basis to believe such records are necessary to the progress of an investigation or prosecution, the American judicial system provides the mechanism for seeking release of such confidential records, and librarians are committed to cooperating in such inquiries as required by law.

However, while intended to enhance the government's ability to prevent and fight terrorism, certain provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act expand the authority of the federal government to engage in surveillance and investigative activities that threaten the privacy rights of library users and undermine the confidentiality that supports the free exchange of ideas so critical for democracy. These provisions of the Act do not protect us from terrorism. Rather, they cast a wide net of suspicion and surveillance over the community of readers, researchers and information-seekers.

The Coastline librarians believe that it is especially crucial for a free society to remain vigilant against threats to its liberties, including threats to the privacy rights of library users, during periods of national stress and crisis, when those liberties are most at risk. It has long been the professional ethic of librarianship to protect the confidentiality of those who use library services, and that protection must especially continue in these trying times.