

Campaign for Reader Privacy

*American Booksellers Association • American Library Association
Association of American Publishers • PEN American Center
www.readerprivacy.org*

November 10, 2015

Hon. Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear General Lynch,

We write on behalf of the Campaign for Reader Privacy, whose members are the American Booksellers Association, the American Library Association, the Association of American Publishers and PEN American Center. The Campaign was organized in 2004 to fight for the restoration of the protections for the privacy of bookstore and library records that were eliminated by Section 215 of the USA Patriot Act.

The entire book community was alarmed to learn following the passage of the Patriot Act that Section 215 gives the government the power to search any record that is “relevant” to a terrorism investigation. Booksellers, librarians, publishers and writers have fought for many years to protect the privacy of reader records in the belief that people will not feel free to read what they want if they fear that the government is looking over their shoulder. Many courts have recognized this danger by limiting or suppressing subpoenas and search warrants for reader records.

Therefore, we were delighted when Attorney General Eric Holder agreed in 2010 to apply a higher standard to searches of bookstores and libraries. In a letter on December 9, 2010, General Holder promised Senator Patrick Leahy, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, that the Justice Department would implement administratively certain civil liberties protections included in S. 1692, the USA Patriot Act Sunset Extension Act, which Leahy had introduced. Among these provisions were additional protections for bookstores and libraries:

With respect to section 215 records that contain bookseller records, or are from a library and contain personally identifiable information about a patron of the library, we are prepared to require a statement of specific and articulable facts as would have been required under S. 1692, and to notify Congress should it become necessary to change that practice.

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The members of the Campaign for Reader Privacy believe that this promise represented a significant step toward restoring the privacy for reader records. We request that you reaffirm the Department's commitment to requiring specific and articulable facts when the Department seeks records that contain personally identifiable information about a bookstore customer or library patron.

We await your reply and thank you for considering the importance of protecting the freedom to read in the nation's bookstores and libraries.

Sincerely yours,



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