

June 1, 2022

Mr. Beacher Wiggins
Director for Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540-4200

Dear Beacher:

PCC appreciates the work that has been done to remove the offensive, dehumanizing subject heading “Illegal aliens” from LCSH, and consequently, library catalogs around the world. We recognize the significant, unique pressure LC is under to maintain good working relations with members of Congress, in addition to its responsibilities to the U.S. library community.

However, there has been significant pushback about the choice of the replacement terminology. As documented in the 2019 film [Change the Subject](#), the initial challenges to the “Illegal aliens” headings were inspired by the [Drop the I-Word campaign](#) run by the racial justice organization Race Forward, which focused on the importance of removing “illegal” from descriptions of undocumented people. The fact that the replacement terminology still uses “illegal” is objectionable to many in the library community because that term has been weaponized by certain elected officials and others to connote criminality and exploit racial fear. In addition, the new headings do not adequately provide for description of the experiences of undocumented immigrants, relegating their existence to the much broader “Noncitizens” category.

In addition, many librarians expressed dismay at the opaqueness of LC’s decision making regarding this set of headings. In marked contrast to the usual SACO process of a proposed revision being published on a tentative list for feedback from the community, this decision was announced as a fait accompli. Many librarians are still confused about why LC decided to diverge from its initial [March 2016 decision](#) to use the replacement headings “Noncitizens” and “Unauthorized immigration.” Libraries need information about how or why those headings were selected to aid in local decision-making.

As libraries across the U.S. are now faced with the dilemma of whether to adopt LC’s revisions, PCC urges LC to release a statement explaining the rationale behind the selection of “Noncitizens” and “Illegal immigration.” We also encourage LC to continue its efforts to make the LCSH revision process more transparent, as the decisions LC makes significantly influence the operations of libraries in the U.S. and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Baxmeyer
Chair, PCC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee