

Dear Colleague,

I urge my colleagues to vote against the FY17 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill, which is responsible for funding day-to-day operations of the U.S. Congress, including the Library of Congress.

In March of this year, the Library of Congress (LoC) determined that the use of terms like “aliens” and “illegal aliens” is pejorative and outdated. The proposal to change that terminology came after a university group petitioned the LoC to change the language, and the American Library Association published a resolution calling for our nation’s most prestigious library to replace the terms. Following these calls from the community, the LoC convened a panel to review the terms and concluded that they were indeed pejorative and proposed revising the terms to “noncitizens” and “unauthorized immigration.”

Unfortunately, buried within a Committee Report for the FY17 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill is a provision that would force the LoC to continue using the pejorative terms “aliens” and “illegal aliens.” This is the first time in the history of the U.S. Congress that legislators have interfered in the Library’s subject headings processes, and they are doing so to force the use of a derogatory term in the Library of Congress’ subject headings.

Yesterday, I testified before the Rules Committee advocating for my amendments that would allow the LoC to move forward with its proposed changes. Unfortunately, the Rules Committee did not allow for these two amendments to be brought to the House floor for debate and a vote.

I heard a lot of discussion about poison pills being snuck into legislation at the Rules Committee hearing. Unfortunately, Republicans have inserted their own poison pill in report language that would overrule a proposal by the LoC and force the library to continue using these outdated, offensive terms.

Many recognize that “alien” and “illegal alien” are dehumanizing and stigmatize entire immigrant communities. These terms do not reflect our values as a country and our immigrant heritage.

Thankfully, there is precedent for change. Just last month, the House and Senate, in a unanimous decision, voted to remove the terms “Oriental” and “Negro” from federal code. Additionally, removal of these terms was supported by both Republicans and Democrats when it was marked up in the full Committee.

Because terms such as “illegal alien” and “alien” perpetuate the denigration of immigrant communities, I ask that you join me in voting against this legislation. We should stand up for the dignity of all people who call America home and not support the codification of dehumanizing language.

Please contact Sandra Alcala at Sandra.Alcala@mail.house.gov if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress