

**Testimony Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, FY 2026, Concerning Gift Authority for the Government Publishing Office, submitted by James R. Jacobs, US Government Information Librarian, Stanford University**

Dear Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you and this committee today regarding a matter concerning the efficiency, modernization, and public service mission of the Government Publishing Office (GPO). My testimony advocates for a statutory change granting GPO the explicit authority to accept gifts, bequests, and devices of both monetary and nonmonetary property and distribute grants to libraries in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP).

I am the US government information librarian at Stanford University and my library's Federal Depository Library Program coordinator. Stanford has been an FDLP member since 1895. As such, my everyday work is to build historic collections and offer research services to students, faculty, staff and the general public in Santa Clara County and increasingly across the country.

The authority of government agencies to accept gifts and distribute grants is generally restricted without specific statutory authorization. As the Government Accountability Office has noted, "without statutory authority, an individual government agency may not accept gifts of goods or services for its own use".<sup>1</sup> However, other legislative branch entities, such as the Library of Congress, and other federal entities with missions concerning access to information, like the Smithsonian Institution and the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/b-289903.pdf>

National Archives and Records Administration, possess such authority.<sup>2</sup> We recommend gift authority be extended to the GPO.

Providing gift authority to the GPO would yield several significant benefits:

**1. *Saving Taxpayer Money:*** Acceptance of gifts, bequests, and devises can provide GPO with resources beyond its appropriated budget. This could allow GPO to undertake valuable projects in collaboration with FDLP libraries and other organizations, invest in modernization efforts, and enhance its services without requiring additional taxpayer funds. For example, donations could support the digitization and description of historical documents in the “National Collection,”<sup>3</sup> the development of new tools for public access, and the preservation of tangible collections.

**2. *Economy of Services:*** Nonmonetary gifts, such as in-kind services, equipment, or collections of historical materials, could significantly enhance GPO’s operational capacity and resources. Accepting voluntary and uncompensated personal services, for example, could allow for the accession of digitized documents from FDLP libraries or assistance with adding metadata. Granting authority would be a virtuous loop to help to fund preservation and digitization projects in FDLP libraries which would then feed back into GPO’s systems for the betterment of all American citizens. This could speed up the process by which materials are made publicly available and decrease the cost for doing so.

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<sup>2</sup> See Library of Congress 2 USC § 160; Smithsonian Institution 22 USC § 75d; National Archives 44 USC § 2305.

<sup>3</sup> <https://fdlp.gov/about-the-fdlp/the-national-collection>

**3. Improving Public Access to Information:** Enhanced resources through gift acceptance can directly translate to improved public access to government information. Donations and grants could fund initiatives to improve the online repository govinfo.gov, enhance cataloging and indexing services, or support Federal Depository Libraries in their mission to provide no-fee access to government information.

This is an issue that has been previously contemplated by Congress. Draft legislation released by Congress for public comment contained a provision regarding gift authority in section 563.<sup>4</sup> It stated clearly:

*The Public Printer may accept and use gifts and bequests of property (both real and personal) and services in support of the Superintendent's responsibilities under this chapter.*

Section 109 of that bill provided for congressional oversight of the gifts and disclosure of gifts in semi-annual reports. This seems an appropriate framework.

There are few circumstances where Congress can have its cake and eat it too. Extending to GPO the authority to receive gifts and distribute grants could provide enormous benefits to the American people in terms of access to records and do so at no cost to taxpayers. We respectfully request that you provide to GPO the same gift authority that is already available to other agencies who provide the public with access to government records. My recommendation would positively impact the work of the GPO, the 1100+ FDLP libraries and every citizen in every Congressional district.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further. Thank you for your interest and attention.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://freegovinfo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/DRAFT-title44-reform-bill-12-11-17.pdf>