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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

December 12, 1974

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

B-133391



Mr. Paul L. Berry, Director
Reference Department
Library of Congress

Dear Mr. Berry:

We have reviewed the reading program for the blind and physically handicapped persons administered by the Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (Division), Library of Congress. We also visited the Special Services Division of the District of Columbia Public Library which is responsible for the reading program in the District of Columbia. We made our review pursuant to the authority contained in 31 U.S.C. 53 and 67.

We found that the inventory of player equipment loaned to participating regional libraries was not accurate and that the quality of service rendered by the regional libraries to blind and physically handicapped persons needs to be improved. We are bringing these two matters to your attention for whatever corrective action you deem appropriate.

Our findings are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

INVENTORY RECORDS OF EQUIPMENT
NOT ACCURATE

The inventory records maintained by the Division for equipment on loan to regional libraries do not show the correct number of machines actually on hand in regional libraries. As a result, the Division does not have effective control over the accountability of loaned equipment.

The Library of Congress is authorized by 2 U.S.C. 135 to provide books in braille and recordings on discs and tapes and related player equipment to blind and other physically handicapped persons. Since 1965 the Library of Congress has expended over \$12 million for player equipment including parts and accessories for

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use in the reading program. At present, 53 regional libraries and their agencies in 46 States act as storage and distribution points for the equipment used by nearly 400,000 persons.

Inaccuracies in the inventory records occurred because (1) equipment issued to regional libraries was not always reported to the Field Services Section in the Division which is responsible for recording the issued equipment and (2) regional libraries do not always report equipment transfers, damages, thefts, or losses.

The Division receives inventory reports annually of the equipment on hand in each participating regional library. Since the equipment sent to regional libraries is in the nature of a permanent loan, the need for maintaining inventory records by the Division could be eliminated by requiring the regional libraries to show the equipment on hand at the beginning of each year, the equipment received and disposed of during the year, and the equipment on hand at the end of the year. The Field Services Section could verify that each regional library properly recorded the equipment sent during the year.

Recommendation

To strengthen the accounting control over loaned equipment, we recommend that you take steps to (1) insure that all equipment loaned to regional libraries is reported to the Field Services Section and (2) require that inventory reports from regional libraries show the equipment on hand at the beginning of the year, all equipment received and disposed of during the year, and the equipment on hand at the end of the year.

QUALITY OF SERVICE NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED

The quality of service rendered to blind and physically handicapped persons needs to be improved. We found many instances of reader dissatisfaction because:

- Libraries take from several days to several months to fill individual requests.
- Readers are repeatedly supplied the same book.
- Readers are furnished books they have not requested.
- Materials furnished to readers are not usable due to damaged condition.

The effectiveness of the reader program depends to a large extent on adequate service by the regional libraries.

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The Division has not issued standards for the quality of service to be achieved by regional libraries under the reading program. Negotiations with regional libraries participating in the program are limited to oral agreements and, in some instances, to a memorandum of understanding. These informal agreements do not provide adequate standards and requirements to insure effective operation of the program, particularly adequate reader service. Many regional librarians believe that written agreements containing standards and guidelines for carrying out the reading program would improve the quality of service.

Recommendation

We recommend that you enter into written contractual agreements with each participating regional library. These agreements should contain minimum standards for reader service.

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We discussed our findings and recommendations with Library of Congress officials who generally agreed with our recommendations and expressed a willingness to take corrective action.

We appreciate the cooperation given our representatives during the review. We would appreciate your advising us of the corrective action you have taken or plan to take on our recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

Bernard A. Brady
Bernard A. Brady
Assistant Director