



Senate Bill S.1253 Geospatial Data Act of 2017

URISA Position – July 5, 2017

The Federal Geospatial Data Act of 2017 (S.1253), co-sponsored by Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Dean Heller (R-NV) and Mark Warner (D-VA), has become a topic of much discussion among URISA members and the GIS community as a whole. The American Association of Geographers (AAG) recently responded with a paper warning of the possible negative consequences to the GIS community should this bill be enacted, stating it “could effectively exclude everyone but licensed architects, engineers, and surveyors from federal government contracts for GIS and mapping services of all kinds”. Given the possible impact to our members and the community as a whole, the URISA Board strongly objects to the bill as is currently written and is in agreement with AAG.

While the objective of the bill, codifying what is currently implemented through executive action, formalizes the Federal Geographic Data Committee, the National Spatial Data Infrastructure, geospatial standards and eliminating geospatial duplication among other things are goals that URISA has long supported. The current wording contained in the bill appears to define much of the work we do in GIS as requiring a licensed professional such as a Surveyor, Engineer or Architect. Our objection is to the wording found in Section 11, subsections b and c, which state:

Subsection (b) DEFINITION -- For purposes of selecting a firm for a contract under chapter 11 of title 40, United States Code, the term “surveying and mapping” shall have the meaning given the term “geospatial data” in section 2 of this Act.

Subsection (c) MODIFICATION OF FEDERAL ACQUISITION REGULATION – Part 36 of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (48 C.F.R. 36.000 et seq.) shall be revised to specify that the definition of the term “architectural and engineering services” includes surveying and mapping services and the acquisition of geospatial data, to which the selection procedures of subpart 36.6 of such part 36 of the Federal Acquisition Regulation shall apply.

Section 2 referred to in Section 11(b) has definitions. Specifically, Subsection (5) defines the term “geospatial data”. The definition includes most of what we think of as GIS and also includes professions like surveying, photogrammetry, etc. Section 2, while itemizing geospatial functions, does not currently make a distinction among those listed in Subsection (5) and therefore can be read, based on the current wording in the bill, as all falling under the category of “surveying and mapping”.

This will have a twofold impact on our members and the GIS Community. First, it would classify geospatial services in a manner which would force procurement under the Brooks Act. The Brooks Act requires all services which qualify to be procured using Qualification Based Selection (QBS). This means the standard RFP process, which URISA has long held is the best way to procure geospatial services and many local governments currently use, may no longer be allowed. It has been and continues to be URISA’s belief that QBS favors larger companies and makes it harder for smaller firms to win contracts as well as leading to increased cost for government.

Second, it would adversely impact many companies which currently provide quality geospatial services which do not have licensed professionals on staff by no longer allowing them to provide the services upon which they have built their business. This would cause them to go out of business leaving many geospatial professionals without a job to support their families.

URISA Member and Past President, Cy Smith, is actively working with Senator Hatch's Staff on the wording. It is URISA's hope that the objectional language will be removed and/or clarified in a manner that is more truly in line with the current professional practice of GIS.

For more information about this issue please follow the links below:

[Full text of Senate Bill S.1253](#)

[AAG Article "A New Plot to Hijack GIS and Mapping"](#)

[Thoughts on the Geospatial Act of 2017 by Bill Dollins](#)

[Geospatial Data Act Sets Table for Performance & Accountability](#)

If you have any other concerns or comments about this issue or URISA's position, please feel free to contact me at tcorbin@egisassociates.com. URISA will continue monitoring this issue.

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President