



Lisa A. Dunner Testifies Before House Judiciary Committee “The U.S. Copyright Office: Its Functions and Resources”

For Immediate Release

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Washington, D.C. -- On Thursday, February 26, 2015, Lisa Dunner, in her capacity as Chair of the ABA Section of Intellectual Property Law, testified before the House Judiciary Committee at a hearing entitled “The U.S. Copyright Office: Its Functions and Resources.” As copyright reform is now getting under way, the focus of this hearing was on bringing the Copyright Office into the 21st Century and how Congress might address issues that have been plaguing the Copyright Office for many years. In particular, the primary focus of the Committee was on three key issues: (1) autonomy for the Copyright Office; (2) technology; and (3) funding.

Ms. Dunner testified that the three issues are “interdependent and inextricably linked.” Increased autonomy for the Copyright Office would enable it to make a more effective case for adequate funding, which in turn could provide much needed improvements in technology. Currently, the Copyright Office resides as one of many departments within the Library of Congress. Its budget is literally a line item on the Library’s overall budget, and the Office shares the Library’s infrastructure and IT systems. The result of this, among other things, is that the Office cannot keep up with the needs of its users, and its systems are woefully out of date.

When asked about whether the Copyright Office should be moved into the Department of Commerce and joined with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, Ms. Dunner and the other witnesses all agreed that such a move would not be a good idea. The overall missions of both entities are quite different, and while the USPTO's IT system is an enviable model to follow, it would not make sense to merge the two Offices. All of the witnesses expressed their personal views that moving the Office outside of the Library and making it an independent freestanding agency likely would be the most desirable choice for both the Copyright Office and the Copyright community. In so doing, the Office would have more flexibility over its infrastructure, rule making, registration and recordation processes.

It is clear from the line of questioning offered by the Committee members that the House Judiciary Committee is interested in taking steps towards reforming the current structure and funding of the Copyright Office. Indeed, a number of Committee members were most appreciative for the insight provided by the witnesses, and many of the Committee members indicated that it is time that the Copyright Office is brought into the 21st Century.

Lisa Dunner's full testimony is available here:

http://judiciary.house.gov/index.cfm/hearings?Id=517A06E1-2222-42C6-87B2-05D64633F62D&Statement_id=D8C20362-35D7-451A-A98E-3D20A78D8E85