

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March XX, 2020

The Honorable Michael B. Quigley
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Financial Services
& General Government
2000 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Graves
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Financial Services
& General Government
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Quigley and Ranking Member Graves:

As Members of Congress with a strong interest in historic preservation and open access to public records, we write in support of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). We respectfully request you appropriate at least \$395 million for the agency's operating expenses in the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill and at least \$7 million for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

NARA's core function is to preserve and make accessible federal government and historical records. The National Archives now has over 40 facilities nationwide including its main facilities in Washington, D.C. and College Park, Maryland, and 14 Presidential Libraries. NARA is also responsible for the Federal Register and the NHPRC, which provides grants for the creation of documentary collections (books and electronic) of the papers of nationally significant individuals and institutions.

NARA's operating expenses budget in constant dollars has remained stagnant for over a decade, even as its responsibilities have increased. NARA's FY 20 operating expenses budget is \$359 million, which is \$14 million less than the FY 19 level of \$373 million. When adjusted for inflation, NARA's budget has decreased by 10% since 2012. As government agencies transition to electronic records, the volume of NARA's holdings has increased more than threefold, as has the time required to process these new documents. Congress has also placed additional responsibilities on the agency, including requiring NARA to reduce the backlogs of records awaiting declassification. Additionally, NARA has also been given responsibility for three new presidential libraries in the last decades, increasing staff, maintenance, and records management costs.

Despite these added responsibilities, NARA today has fewer employees than it did in 1985. This combination of increased responsibilities and underfunding has forced NARA to cut back on public services and research hours at its facilities. These hours are not adequate to serve the public need for accessibility and government accountability and limit the ability for American's to access their own government's public records. Research at NARA facilities is used to prove citizenship, conduct genealogical research, or gain access to earned veterans their benefits. Additionally, Freedom of Information Act requests and declassifications are backlogged due to a lack of resources.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's support for NHPRC in recent years, and it is crucial that it continue to be funded at \$7 million or above. In addition to distributing grants across the country the leverage private funds, NHPRC supports grants that tackle major archival issues, such as preservation of electronic records, disaster preparedness, and coordination and communication among archivists nationwide.

We understand the many difficult choices the Subcommittee faces in constructing its FY 2021 budget bill. NHPRC, meanwhile, plays a crucial role in ensuring that historical records across the United States are preserved and made accessible. Thank you for your consideration of this request for NARA and NHPRC.

Sincerely,