

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 7, 2021

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Chair
Subcommittee on Financial Service and
General Government
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Financial Services and
General Government
702 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Van Hollen and Ranking Member Hyde-Smith:

As the subcommittee considers the Fiscal Year 2022 Financial Service and General Government appropriations bill, we request you robustly fund the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

NARA should use the funds to manage the numerous programmatic concerns from the agency's Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, and multiple NARA user constituencies. Among those concerns are staffing for NARA's public research rooms and upgrades to NARA's information technology (IT) infrastructure.

The National Archives is the largest record keeper in the United States and fulfills the crucial function of preserving and providing access to federal government and historical records.¹ This includes many historic documents that are integral to the foundation of the United States, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. NARA's reach spreads over 40 facilities, 32 regional archives and record centers, and 15 presidential libraries across the country.²

NARA facilities are crucial to researchers and veterans. In an average year the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) responds to more than one million requests for copies of

¹ National Archives, "About the National Archives of the United States", <https://www.archives.gov/publications/general-info-leaflets/1-about-archives.html>.

² National Archives, "Visit Us", <https://www.archives.gov/locations#>.

military records.³ In 2020, NARA closed facilities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), leaving researchers, students, historians, educators, veterans and their families, and the public, unable to access their records in person.⁴ The closure of the NPRC, until recently, has delayed veterans and their families from obtaining copies of service records, increasing obstacles to receive VA benefits in a timely manner.⁵

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) is a bridge between the National Archives and the nation's archives. With increased funding, the NHPRC will better enable the American people, wherever located, to access and use their historical records at their local archives and online.

In the past decade, NARA's responsibilities have increased, but its federal funding for operating expenses has remained stagnant. After accounting for \$18 million of NARA's FY 2021 budget being reserved for the presidential transition, NARA's budget last year was less than its FY 2013 budget.⁶ The lack of adequate resources creates more barriers for Americans trying to prove citizenship, conduct genealogical research, and gain access to veterans' benefits. Lack of access to records and primary sources also hinders the ability of historians to interpret our past and promote robust civic education. Underfunding also obstructs transparency: veteran records, Freedom of Information Act requests, and records that need to be declassified have all been backlogged because of the lack of funding.⁷ Finally, it hinders NARA's ability to hire qualified archivists to both serve patrons and develop records management systems needed for the influx of electronic records. These resources are especially necessary this year as the National Archives approaches the December 2022 electronic records transfer deadline.⁸

We believe this funding request is needed to address the backlog created by insufficient funding over the past decade, and to provide the National Archives with the resources it needs to fulfill its goal of preserving historical records and ensuring they are accessible to everyone. Thank you for your time and consideration to this request and your continued support in sustaining and strengthening the National Archives and Records Administration.

Sincerely,

³ National Archives and Records Administration, "FY 2021 Congressional Justification", February 10, 2020, pp. 16, <https://www.archives.gov/files/about/plans-reports/performance-budget/2021performance-budget.pdf>; LX News, "Veterans Across U.S. Can't Access Benefits Because Key Agency Hasn't Returned to Work", Noah Pransky, March 16, 2021, <https://www.lx.com/politics/veterans-across-u-s-cant-access-benefits-because-key-agency-hasnt-returned-to-work/32884/>.

⁴ National Archives, "Coronavirus", <https://www.archives.gov/coronavirus>.

⁵ National Archives, "Veterans' Service Records", <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records-0>;

⁶ House Committee on Appropriations, FY2021 Joint Explanatory Statement "Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act, 2021", pp. 44, <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20201221/BILLS-116RCP68-JES-DIVISION-E.pdf>.

⁷ Letter from Archivist of the United States to David S. Ferriero to the U.S. House of Representatives, December 10, 2020.

⁸ Letter from Acting Director Russell T. Vought and Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, June 28, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/policy/m-19-21-transition-to-federal-records.pdf>.

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Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

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Dan Sullivan
United States Senator

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Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

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Mike Crapo
United States Senator

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Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

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James E. Risch
United States Senator

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Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

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Tammy Baldwin
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Jon Tester
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Jeanne Shaheen
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Benjamin L. Cardin
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Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

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Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

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Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

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Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator