

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2024

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

The Honorable Bill Hagerty  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and  
General Government  
251 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Van Hollen and Ranking Member Hagerty:

As the subcommittee considers the Fiscal Year 2025 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).

The National Archives is the largest record keeper in the United States and fulfills the crucial function of preserving and providing access to the federal government and historical records.<sup>1</sup> 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. In addition to the broad national audience it serves through its increasingly dynamic online presence, NARA's reach spreads over 40 facilities, 32 regional archives and record centers, and 16 presidential libraries across the country.<sup>2</sup>

NARA facilities are crucial to researchers and veterans. On an average year, the National Personnel Records Center responds to more than one million requests for copies of military records.<sup>3</sup> All of NARA's research rooms have now reopened and NARA has completed processing its backlog of hundreds of thousands of veterans' requests by deploying technology improvements, adding staff, and expanding work hours and contract labor.<sup>4</sup> NARA receives more than 4,000 new requests each day.<sup>5</sup> More resources, including additional support for in-person research activities, are needed to meet this demand and remain sustainable in light of all the other work for which NARA is

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

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

<sup>3</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, "FY 2021 Congressional Justification", February 10, 2020, p. 5, <https://www.archives.gov/files/about/plans-reports/performance-budget/2021performance-budget.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> National Archives, "NARA Eliminates Pandemic backlog of Veteran Records Requests," press release, January 24, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

responsible.<sup>6</sup> In addition, like many executive branch agencies NARA has now seen an increase in their backlog of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, which places a continuous and unsustainable administrative burden on the agency.<sup>7</sup> Finally, NARA has made significant progress toward its goal of digitizing all of its analog holdings, but its goal of digitizing 500 million pages by 2026 falls drastically short of the 12 billion<sup>8</sup> pages NARA must process to transition all records to a digital format.<sup>9</sup> NARA requires more funding to manage the enormous scope of its digitization efforts, including the challenge of making this vast electronic archive discoverable.

The NHPRC is a bridge between the National Archives and the nation's archives. The NHPRC State Board Programming Grants program encourages an understanding of democracy, history and culture by supporting state's efforts to preserve, and increase online access to, historical records.<sup>10</sup> 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. 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 and open government: FOIA requests, and records that need to be declassified have all been backlogged because of the lack of funding.<sup>11</sup> Insufficient funding hinders NARA's ability to hire qualified archivists to serve patrons, develop records management systems needed for the influx of electronic records, and complete its digitization efforts.<sup>12</sup>

We believe our 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

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> National Archives, "FISCAL YEAR 2023 Annual Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Report," <https://www.archives.gov/files/foia/reports/nara-fy-2023-annual-foia-report.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> National Archives, "Strategy for Digitizing Archival Materials for Public Access, 2015-2024," <https://www.archives.gov/digitization/strategy.html>.

<sup>9</sup> National Archives, "Strategic Plan 2022-2026," <https://www.archives.gov/about/plans-reports/strategic-plan/strategic-plan-2022-2026#:~:text=1.2%20By%20FY%202026%2C%20NARA,available%20to%20the%20public%20online>.

<sup>10</sup> National Historical Publications & Records Commission, "State Board Programming Grants," <https://www.archives.gov/nhprc/announcement/state.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Archivist of the United States to David S. Ferriero to the U.S. House of Representatives, December 10, 2020, on file with the Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies from Director Shalanda D. Young and Acting Archivist of the United States Debra Steidel Wall, December 23, 2022, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/M\\_23\\_07-M-Memo-Electronic-Records\\_final.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/M_23_07-M-Memo-Electronic-Records_final.pdf).

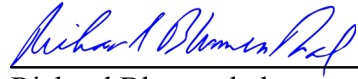
support in sustaining and strengthening the National Archives and Records Administration.

Sincerely,



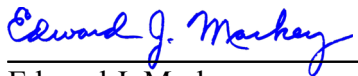
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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



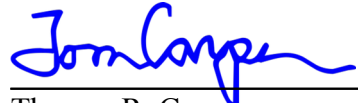
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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



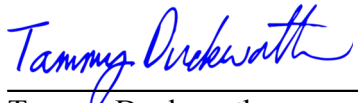
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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



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Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator



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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



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Tina Smith  
United States Senator



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Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Peter Welch  
United States Senator



Mike Crapo  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator



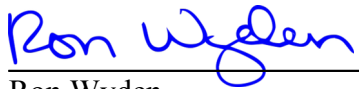
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



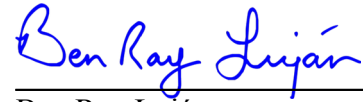
James E. Risch  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



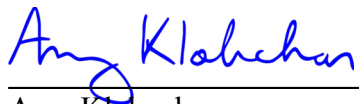
Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator