

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 11, 2022

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 2023 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 be directed to 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. NARA's in-person research rooms should be fully open and staffed to meet demand for basic services and records access at pre-pandemic levels.

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.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 16 presidential libraries across the country.²

NARA facilities are crucial to researchers and veterans. On an average year, the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) responds to more than one million requests for copies of military records.³ All of NARA's research rooms have now reopened as the COVID pandemic ebbs. But pandemic related disruptions still continue due to the backlog of requests and demands for services.⁴ Researchers, students, historians, educators, veterans and their families, and the public, have difficulty accessing records in person, having to make appointments well in advance

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#>.

³ 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>.

⁴ National Archives and Records Administration, "FY 2023 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLAN and FY 2021 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT," p.6, <https://www.archives.gov/files/about/plans-reports/performance-accountability/par2023-2021.pdf>.

with limits on the number of records that can be requested at one time.⁵ For example, the closure of the NPRC delayed veterans and their families from obtaining copies of service records, increasing obstacles to receive VA benefits in a timely manner.⁶ NARA has a backlog of hundreds of thousands of veteran's requests and has had to reallocate already stretched resources to address the problem.⁷ NARA is also faced with a backlog of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.⁸

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. 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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,

⁵ National Archives, "Coronavirus," <https://www.archives.gov/coronavirus>.

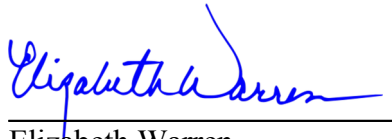
⁶ National Archives, "Veterans' Service Records," <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records-0>;

⁷ Fedscoop, "House lawmakers introduce bill to address NARA veterans' records backlog," John Hewitt Jones, March 31, 2022, <https://www.fedscoop.com/house-lawmakers-introduce-bill-to-address-nara-veterans-records-backlog/>.

⁸ National Archives, "Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Report," p.19, <https://www.archives.gov/files/foia/reports/nara-fy21-final.pdf>.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ National Archives and Records Administration, "FY 2022 Congressional Justification," May 28, 2021, p. 21, <https://www.archives.gov/files/about/plans-reports/performance-budget/2022performance-budget.pdf>.



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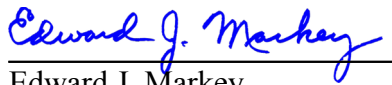
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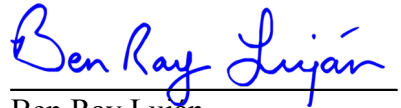
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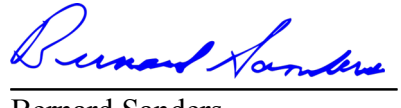
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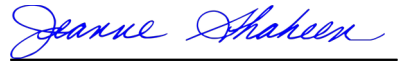
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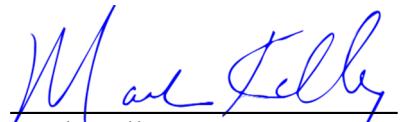
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