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Greetings members and subscribers. Our board of directors has been quite busy. We have a lot of news!

## **Advocating for researchers**

We are currently assisting with a new, bipartisan 'Dear Colleague' letter that is sponsored by the offices of Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren and Republican Senator Dan Sullivan. This letter will ask Congress to robustly fund the National Archives in 2023. It calls for Congress to direct funding for specific programs, including the staffing of its research rooms. The letter also recognizes the importance of restoring full access to NARA's in-person research rooms at pre pandemic levels. Over the past two years, we have worked tirelessly to convey this message to Congress. After a series of presentations to congressional staffers in Washington D.C., we have convinced a significant number of offices to support our effort. This is an amazing achievement, and we thank each of you for reaching out to your representatives to show them how important this issue is to voters.

## **Where things stand today**

After a much-needed reassessment of the statistical standards and restrictions imposed (or re-imposed) after the Omicron variant of COVID emerged in November 2021, we are finally seeing public research facilities operated by the National Archives and Records Administration reopen. Those in the DC area were among the first to reopen in March 2022 and many others in their system have reopened by appointment since then. Services and records access continue to improve but we still have work to do to get back to where we were before the pandemic.

Going forward, the ARA will focus on expanded access to physical records; we fully believe the appointment system NARA instituted should be optional. Our members and others must be able to walk-in and continue work they are pursuing on multiple

projects. We are also concerned that the National Archives St. Louis research room is not yet fully open. Limited access to some archival records at that facility is now possible but ARA will continue to advocate for increased access across the board, including restoring evening and weekend hours. Since more access hours and more patrons in research rooms mean NARA will need more staff, the ARA is committed to advocating on NARA's behalf for the resources they need to enhance and restore research room operations.

The reduction of COVID cases across the country made it possible for our members and others to begin to return to work. As noted, we have already seen an expansion of access since NARA's initial reopening in March 2022. This is exciting because it proves that access and safety can indeed coexist. We hope the worst of this pandemic is over and that NARA can continue to move toward normal operations.

## **NARA 2022 Budget**

We were very proud to be part of the effort to increase funding for the National Archives for the 2022 fiscal year. ARA's board met with more than 120 congressional offices last year in an unprecedented effort to convince lawmakers to approve targeted funding for NARA that would benefit the researching public. We were pleased that Congress did ultimately increase funding for the agency by about \$20 million in the 2022 budget. However, important language we had hoped to see included was not part of the final bill. We remain committed to working for increased funding for the agency in the coming years and hope the 2023 budget will authorize funding to revitalize NARA's research rooms and expand access to the visiting public.

## **Keeping Congress informed**

Members of our executive committee met with numerous Senate and House offices in January and February of this year to explain how the continued closures impacted the researcher community. Senate and House offices representing states with NARA research rooms and members of government oversight committees were our main focus. The response to our message was overwhelmingly positive and we hope our allies in Congress will continue to press the White House and NARA to dedicate the necessary resources to resume pre-pandemic levels of service in research rooms nationwide.

## Petition

Special thanks to advisory board member Jessica Taylor for beginning a [petition to reopen National Archives research rooms](#). Her petition was shared with more than 500 of our contacts in congressional offices and it continues to showcase just how important NARA's research rooms are to the American public. The petition has received more than 6,000 signatures in just a few months. Please continue to share it and encourage others to sign and share it as well. Our work is not finished until NARA's research rooms are fully open and providing pre pandemic levels of access from coast to coast.

## Thank you to NARA

We wish to thank the archives leaders who got the ball rolling on reopening and also wish to tip our hats to all other NARA staff and let them know we value their safety and the work they do. For those of us lucky enough to get appointments to date, it has been wonderful to see you all again and we look forward to getting back to normal research operations.

Kind regards, ARA

