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**Before the Subcommittee on
Information Policy, Census and National Archives
of the
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
of the United States House of Representatives**

**“Strengthening the
National Historical Publications and Records Commission”**

June 9, 2010

Chairman Clay, Ranking Member McHenry, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing concerning the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). I appreciate being allowed the honor of testifying before your subcommittee on behalf of the Council of State Archivists to support reauthorization for the NHPRC. As the Vice-President of the Council of State Archivists, and the State Archivist and Records Administrator of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, I have twenty-seven years of experience with NHPRC grants, and know how much more effective an increased authorization and appropriation for the NHPRC will be for state and local government agencies around the country.

The Council of State Archivists, or CoSA, represents the state archivists of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories. CoSA's mission is to strengthen state and territorial archives in their work to preserve America's historical records. One of CoSA's major partners in our efforts to preserve and provide access to the records of the American people is the NHPRC.

I ask, on behalf of CoSA, the archival profession, but most of all for the millions of citizens who rely on records and archives, that you increase the authorization of NHPRC to \$40 million, with \$20 million for national competitive grants and \$20 million for pass through grants to the states. This is an increase over the current \$10 million authorization that has been in effect since 1991. This authorization increase will permit a larger appropriation so NHPRC may continue its national competitive grant program at a higher level and also begin to award formula based, pass through grants to the states. These grants can be used to address critical needs, far more comprehensively than current NHPRC grants are able to do, and be distributed according to priorities within each state, specific to its own requirements. The increased authorization for pass

through funding to the states will create more jobs in archives and records management programs and will provide the desperately needed capacity to preserve and provide access to essential evidence that documents both government and the individual rights of citizens, based on the varying needs in each state.

CoSA has a very strong interest in strengthening the NHPRC, because federal regulations assign specific duties to the state archivists in relation to the NHPRC. These regulations designate the State Archivist to work with the NHPRC as a "State Historical Records Coordinator" who manages a State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB). The state archivists and the state boards, or SHRABs, assist the NHPRC in disseminating information about grant opportunities, creating strategic plans for archives and records, and reviewing grant proposals from their states before they are submitted to the NHPRC.

CoSA members, in reviewing grant applications that come through the SHRABs prior to submission to NHPRC, are constantly confronted with the great demand for funding for archives and records projects. Authorization and appropriation amounts for the NHPRC are not nearly commensurate with the serious need that exists among your constituents and mine. Because of NHPRC's limited resources, only a small fraction of the requests it receives from among the nation's 14,000 archives and manuscript repositories can be supported. As a result, records that tell compelling stories from many viewpoints of our states and people, quietly disintegrate as they await basic care, preservation, and public use. It is time that this nation increases our financial commitment to the records that serve as the foundation of this democracy, that protect and give evidence of the rights, history, and development of this country in all its regions and among all our people.

In 2010, state archivists report state budgets cuts that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. The Kentucky State Archives alone, which holds one of the largest state and local government records collections in the country, has seen a budget reduction of nearly 25% over the past three years. With similar drastic cuts in state archival agencies across the nation, the effect on our nation's records, and on individuals who depend on those records, is reaching catastrophic proportions. We live in an era of significantly increased emphasis on government transparency, in which records play a crucial role and the demands and expectations for access to information is skyrocketing. At the same time, archivists and records managers face obstacles in that electronic records pose almost unimaginable challenges in terms of capture and long-term preservation. Archivists are in the untenable position during this time of fiscal constraint, of having to make judgments about where to expend their limited funds. We do not want to be compelled to choose what essential documentation we will neglect: new technologies, voluminous paper records of the recent past, or our most historic records.

Government records - federal, state, and local - contain the most indispensable documentation of individual rights and of individual transactions with government. From deeds, marriages, courts cases, students' school transcripts, and wills on the local government level; to documentation of licensing, human services, environmental controls, and policies on the state level; to military service, health care and citizenship, among the many functions of the federal government, records touch each of us as individuals. Government records are fundamental to our daily lives, our rights, and our responsibilities as citizens of this great nation. When archival documents are preserved in our states and communities, we protect the evidence of ownership of land, the rights

and privileges of individual citizens, the right to know about the workings of government, the genealogy of our families, and the cultural heritage of America.

Our nation has recognized the importance of preserving federal documents, archives and our history by its support of national institutions like the National Archives and Records Administration, the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian Institution. This support does not address the other vital archives that are held in state and local governments, historical societies, and library history collections. It is essential that more resources be directed to states and localities to ensure that documents and archival records can be readily used for a host of purposes by the people of this nation.

Without money to microfilm deeds of land transfer, what might happen to land ownership if the original is destroyed in a fire or flood, as happened during Hurricane Katrina? What might happen if a state's database of birth, death, or marriage records is not backed up properly? If criminal case files are not stored properly and disintegrate over time, will prosecution for repeat offenders or appeals of convictions be possible? What might happen if social work case files are not maintained and a child is abused or harmed because the record does not exist to protect him or her? What if the government does not carefully save documentation of its regulation of industry, and a disaster occurs that affects livelihoods, tourism, and plant and animal life? Where would we be as individuals, as people, without our records to document our history, our memory, and our legal transactions?

The organizations managing this essential evidence face many challenges, from destruction of our documentary heritage through fire and hurricanes, to the insidious deterioration of acidic paper, to the risks posed by unstable and inaccessible modern electronic media. The American record needs attention now, to ensure that the documents, records, and collections we need and treasure are cared for and available to all Americans for generations to come.

An additional challenge that we face in the states, and that our local and federal colleagues face as well, is dealing with preserving electronic data. Although it is expensive to save paper records and to store them in a secure and environmentally sound repository, it is far more expensive to preserve records that are created electronically. Variations in databases, systems, hardware and software, backup and migration requirements make dealing with electronic records more complicated. NHPRC has been in the forefront of providing money for research on how best to preserve electronic information and for initiating electronic records archives programs. We are making progress on digital preservation in many ways, but funding and leadership from the NHPRC is absolutely imperative to continue the work leading toward best practices and standards to preserve electronic records.

The state archivists' work with NHPRC grants is a superior example of federal-state cooperation using a limited amount of money to create a significant benefit to the country. Small grants are received by institutions in the states, to care for and preserve records, while creating jobs, saving many important records that form our collective history, and making records and archives more widely accessible for all. The need for the states to care for records of historical importance and records that document citizens' rights has always been great and is increasing dramatically with the demands of electronic records and citizen expectations for ubiquitous access.

Kansas provides one example of the significant impact NHPRC has had in states with limited resources. Patricia Michaelis of the Kansas State Historical Society and the current President of the Council of State Archivists, who deeply regrets that she is not able to represent CoSA at the hearing today, explains that “The National Historical Publications and Records Commission has made its money go farther and has reached more diverse audiences than most federal granting agencies.... The impact is particularly significant in a state like Kansas that has few professional archivists but numerous local historical institutions that house unpublished records.... The impact of NHPRC on archives in Kansas is highly significant but ultimately incalculable.”

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History staff notes that the NHPRC has supported an extraordinary range of programs in that state, including the establishment of municipal and county archives programs, management of the state’s electronic records, and a statewide survey of African American materials. Emergency funds enabled the State Archives to assist more than 80 cultural organizations in the months immediately after Hurricane Katrina, and to save some of the few remaining historical records on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Currently NHPRC funds are supporting the inventory and preservation of records, 1780-1920, in the state’s first fourteen counties.

Like Mississippi, my home state of Kentucky does not fare well in various national rankings. That does not hold true for our state and local government archives and records programs, in part because of NHPRC grant money received at various times over the past three decades. NHPRC grants allowed Kentucky and other states to begin many projects and programs that continue to this day, including several major programs at my agency, the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. For instance, in 1983, Kentucky received almost \$200,000 for a demonstration re-grant program for city and county government records. The program was so successful in providing preservation, security, and access that the state legislature appropriated permanent funding to continue this program. Twenty-seven years later, the Kentucky Local Records Program has awarded over \$16 million in grants for local government records. That is an 8000% return on investment. In addition, the program has created countless jobs in caring for or reformatting records, and preserved nearly every important record in Kentucky’s 120 counties. Most importantly, records are secured, such as in Carlisle County, where all the deeds, mortgages, and wills had been microfilmed prior to a courthouse fire in 2008, or in another county, where a vandal removed pages from a deed book that had, thankfully, already been microfilmed. Although several other states have created programs similar to the Kentucky Local Records Program, most notably, New York, Missouri, and New Jersey, the majority of state archives do not have the resources to provide for the preservation of records of their local governments. These records secure the individual rights of our citizens, by offering proof of property ownership, marriage, divorce, and probate/property disposition. The states need the help of the NHPRC to provide for the preservation, safety, and security of these records of American citizens.

In another grant of note, the Kentucky State Archives was also a recipient of an early electronic records grant, or, as it was called in 1985, a “machine readable records program” for state government. This \$140,000 grant created three jobs initially, spurred the legislature to create three more jobs, and did ground-breaking work in saving early state government electronic records from destruction.

Many of my colleagues started their professional careers with a job funded by an NHPRC grant. I did myself in my first job in the 1980s, as did my colleagues in California, Georgia, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, and Rhode Island, among others. It has been the case both in Kentucky and around the nation that many demonstration projects have created follow up or long-term projects, all of which have created jobs to preserve and protect records. Archival and preservation work is labor-intensive, whether flattening records in folders for preservation; assisting a researcher in finding a personally significant record; or in reformatting a record through making a microfilm or digital copy. An analysis of existing NHPRC grant projects showed that at least 75% of the grant funds are used to pay staff, demonstrating that money for archives generally equates to money for jobs.

For the past two years, the NHPRC has offered grants called "State and National Archival Partnership" grants, or SNAP grants, to strengthen archives and historical records programs in each of the states and to build a national archival network. These grants have been for decidedly modest amounts, from \$15,000 to the maximum of \$50,000 for each applicant. Only seventy-eight grants, totaling a little over \$2.7 million in the past three years, have been awarded, because of the limitations of NHPRC funding. These grants have been absolutely critical to the states, and we applaud NHPRC for initiating this approach and strongly encourage its continuation and expansion into a larger pass through grant program to the states.

In spite of the limited funding, the opportunities that states have pursued to use these grants have had impressive results. An example of a SNAP grant is a recent award to the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board to ensure the identification and preservation of documentation of families and organizations affected by the World Trade Center attack. With modest funding of \$41,000, New York created a website "9/11 Memory and History: What to Save and How" that provides videos, instructions, and resource materials for families and organizations affected by the disaster. The information provided, while specific to one incident, is useful for any state or community experiencing a significant event—whether human caused tragedies like terrorism or a campus shooting, or natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina.

This New York project is, however, only one modestly funded project in one single state. The need that resulted in this project exists in every state, and on many topics and issues. There are simply so many unaddressed needs in the states: from developing disaster plans to protect records, to documenting the history and experiences of the Civil Rights movement, to creating tools to bring historical records into the classroom; so much needs to be done for so many purposes. The capacity to undertake such projects exists in every state. We lack, however, the federal directive for NHPRC to fund such projects, and a viable funding base to carry it out. We ask that NHPRC's authorization be raised sufficiently to allow it to begin making pass through grants to benefit our constituents and yours, in every single state.

The NHPRC has had a substantial impact in the development and progress of the archival profession in the United States since it began awarding grants for archives and records projects in 1976. The NHPRC and its staff have been supportive, innovative, and solution oriented. The many contributions that the NHPRC has made to the safety and preservation of our Kentucky records have been repeated in other states and institutions throughout the country. I cannot imagine that many of these archives and

records projects would have been undertaken or even conceived without the support of the NHPRC, the government agency that truly provides a great benefit with a very small appropriation of federal dollars. For our profession, the NHPRC is the little agency with the big impact. I ask you, on behalf of all the state and territorial archivists in the United States, to allow the NHPRC to make a comprehensive, enduring impact, to create even greater good, by increasing the NHPRC appropriation to \$40 million dollars. With this increase, the NHPRC could build on its success in creating archives and records programs, digitizing archival records, making more records accessible to the public, and leading states in strategic planning and research for historical and documentary records.

In the words of one of my mentors, Dr. Thomas D. Clark, Kentucky's Historian Laureate who spent over seventy-five years involved with Kentucky government records, until his death at age 101 in 2005, "The keeping of the public record of a civilized people is a continuing responsibility where properly the task is never completed. The vigilance necessary to preserve the record is synonymous with that of preserving the freedom of an open and democratic society."

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the subcommittee about the important work of the NHPRC, and its need for more funding to assist the states in meeting their archives and records obligations. On behalf of all the state archivists, who care deeply about the fate of and access to the nation's government records, we thank you for considering this topic. I would be happy to answer any questions about how the NHPRC benefits those who rely on government information and documentation and the resources needed by state archivists to care for essential government records.