Joint Statement on Conducting Public Business in Non-Government Email Accounts (June 2015)

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA), the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA), and the Society of American Archivists (SAA) believe that public officials should use official government email accounts for the conduct of public business. Use of unofficial, non-government email accounts rather than official government accounts violates the transparency and openness that the public requires from its government, makes it difficult to hold public officials accountable, unnecessarily mixes government and personal records, and ultimately jeopardizes the accessibility of the archival record to the American people.

CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA believe that the public trust requires officials at all levels of government to be familiar with and to follow all applicable local, state, and federal laws for recordkeeping requirements. Managing email is just one part of a comprehensive government archives and records program that facilitates efficient conduct of government programs and services, ensures effective management of government information, and provides adequate documentation of government activities.

CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA encourage the United States Congress, state legislatures, and local government bodies to pass strong and comprehensive records management laws and regulations. Further, lawmakers at all levels should be encouraged to provide funding and resources necessary to ensure compliance with these laws. Legislation should include serious penalties for any government official who breaks recordkeeping laws or willfully withholds official communications from appropriate government recordkeeping systems.

CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA believe that democratic governments require comprehensive records management laws and adequately funded archival and records management programs to ensure the public’s right to know, the accountability of government officials, and the preservation of government records with historical value. By creating and adhering to records management laws that achieve the highest possible level of transparency, public officials fulfill the trust of the American people and the highest standards of an open government.

CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA represent professional archivists who identify essential evidence of society and ensure its accessibility by the public for generations to come. Our work supports accountability, legal and fiscal needs, and the preservation of the American historical record. This is particularly true of government archives, which provide documentary evidence about government administration and ensure transparency and accountability.