



DOCUMENTING GOVERNMENT

PROMOTING HISTORY

SECURING RIGHTS

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) endorses the call by the National Governors Association, the Council of State Governments, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and others for flexible, substantive fiscal relief by Congress to the state and territorial governments.

The government archives of the states, territories, and District of Columbia preserve records that protect citizens' civil and property rights, ensure access to evidence of actions and decisions of their government, and provide rich research materials to the public. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on these government archives have already included reductions in appropriated revenue, the loss of generated revenue, and disruptions to essential public services. Without immediate Congressional action to backfill losses in state revenue, inevitable staff reductions will lead to disruptions in legally mandated records management processes, breakdowns in the preservation of public records, and losses in institutional knowledge needed for the proper management of collections.

One area of work especially imperiled is the preservation of the nation's electronic records. For more than a decade, federal granting institutions such as the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission have invested in defining standards, building capacity, and promoting best practices among the archives of the states, territories, and District of Columbia. COVID-related furloughs and layoffs have and will continue to result in the departure of specially-trained staff that will in turn undermine this progress and destabilize the ability of American citizens to gain access to records created by their governments that affect their lives.

Losses in state revenue are generally felt quickly and deeply in archival agencies. Already underfunded at an average of .002 percent of state and territorial budgets, archives and records management programs are disproportionately harmed by state budget cuts, because they have a high percentage of fixed costs in storage and technical systems, leaving personnel as the only budget item where reductions can be made. The resulting cascade effect diminishes public access, reverses gains made in digitization and electronic records, and threatens the very fabric of historical memory.

We call on Congress to provide funding sufficient to stabilize state budgets and to ensure the continued delivery of services on which the American people rely.

-Approved by the CoSA Board, July 30, 2020

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) is a nonprofit membership organization of the state and territorial government archives in the fifty states, five territories, and District of Columbia. Through collaborative research, education, and advocacy, CoSA provides leadership that strengthens and supports state and territorial archives in their work to preserve and provide access to government records. CoSA facilitates networking, information sharing, and project collaboration among its member organizations to help state and territorial government archives with their responsibilities for protecting the rights and historical documents of the American people. Read more at www.statearchivists.org