

December 5, 2018

The Honorable William Lacy Clay

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United States House of Representatives

St. Louis, MO 63116

Dear Representative William Lacy Clay,

As an Archives Technician for the National Archives at St. Louis and a constituent, I urge you to consider supporting an increase in funding for the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Since our establishment in 1934, NARA has proudly and diligently worked to preserve and care for the records of the United States government, and providing citizens access to the records of all branches of the federal government. As technology has continued to advance rapidly in the past decade alone, we have made efforts to do all that we can to preserve the records of our nation's history and provide various means of access to them as is the right of the American people.

Our primary goals have always been and will continue to be providing information access to the public and preserving the nation's records so that future generations can learn from our mistakes and successes as a democratic nation. We have made plans to start the transition into digital holdings, and by FY 2024 we have pledged to have digitized 500 million pages of records. Currently, only 15% of the 235 million pages of records digitized are available to the public on the NARA catalog. We have been making great strides in order to meet this goal and several others, yet the reality of our situation is that this is being done with minimum equipment, minimum of staff, and minimum of resources. For the past two years, funding has continued to decrease and for our proposed budget for the FY 2019 we have chosen to make the following cuts in Operating Expenses in order to receive funding:

- -\$5.2 million in program efficiency savings
- -\$5 million in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of Presidential Libraries
- -\$3 million in funds dedicated to Information Technology development projects
- -\$2.1 million for shared services and implementing online training
- -\$1.3 due to workforce reductions through attrition.
- -\$6.9 million to development funding for the Electronic Archive 2.0

These numbers are especially worrying for those of us as stewards of history at the National Archives at St. Louis and the National Personnel Records Center. Both organizations receive the highest volume of record requests out of all the organizations under NARA. It is especially

important to us that we are provided with the resources, training opportunities, and equipment to meet the high volume of demand for our records in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The above cuts will only make it more difficult for us to meet patron needs. This is especially egregious considering the needs of our organizations as we work to assist our United States veterans in getting their records for the purpose of receiving their Veteran Affairs benefits. The National Archives at St. Louis has such low staffing levels that we cannot handle the sheer volume of record requests that we receive regularly. Thus we are forced to rely on NPRC to help process offsite record requests for genealogy, benefits, and burial purposes. The National Archives at St. Louis has recently had to stop conducting searches for Navy World War II enlisted personnel files as well due to funding and lack of staff. Staff that was assigned to search for these records have been reassigned to assist with digitization efforts so that we are able to meet the goals prioritized by our headquarters in D.C.

With the new goals laid out in NARA's Strategic Plan for 2018 - 2024, the National Archives at St. Louis has to find the time to train staff on sustainable digitization best practices, while also continue to operate fully. This includes staff who work in the Research Room having to find ways to digitize as many records as possible while having to make cuts in staffing and offering less training opportunities to learn these necessary skills as we move forward in becoming leaders in digital preservation efforts.

The National Archives is perceived as the leading authority in the nation when it comes to the preservation of records. We are expected and held to the standard of providing the best quality work and to be experts when it comes to information needs, but we cannot continue to be the leading authority if we are not able to catch up with current technological advancements. We are only just now upgrading from Windows 7 to a Windows 10 operating system. The computers we have are not compatible with the latest imaging and scanning technology that would make our jobs so much more efficient, and allow us to meet our goals. As an example, the National Archives at St. Louis we purchased two Fujitsu Snap Scanners last year for the public to use to copy records and scan them to a USB drive that they can take home and use however they want. Unfortunately, the hardware was not able to support the amount of memory this device required in order to operate and crashes after a handful of pages. A device we invested in has not been rolled out for public use or for heavy scanning projects until we have solved our IT issues. The National Archives truly needs Congress to invest more in our Information Technology needs, so that we can meet the demands of our researchers and fellow government agencies who expect access not only quickly, but as efficiently as possible. It will be costly, but an investment now saves money in the long term. This is especially true, as we will need to be able to build the cyber infrastructure needed to maintain and protect all of our digital holdings as we live in time where data breaches are happening at a daily rate.

The money invested into NARA will make it possible for the American people to depend on a trustworthy and reliable organization as a source of information regarding the United States government. We are all working together to help make an open and transparent federal

government that the people can trust, which is something the American people want now more than ever in this divisive political climate. Thank you for your consideration and feel free to contact me at if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

Ashney Randle

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