

July 10, 2017

Mr. David Ferriero
Archivist of the United States
National Archives and Records Administration
via email

Dear Mr. Ferriero:

I am writing to express the American Historical Association's concern about NARA's decision to discontinue Saturday opening hours for research rooms at the archives in Washington, DC, and College Park, Maryland. This decision will disadvantage many members of the AHA, others within the historical community, and the general public who are unable to use these facilities during weekday opening hours.

NARA plays a vital role in providing access to public records and resources to help the public do research in those materials. Limiting access by closing research facilities on Saturday will have negative repercussions for the ability of Americans and others to learn about past and current activities of the federal government.

While we are aware that services are currently limited during Saturday hours and that the numbers of users are lower than during the week, many researchers find that Saturday is the only time they can make use of these facilities. The planned additional opening hours during the week do little to accommodate many of these readers. Historical research should not be a privilege limited to those who do not have obligations during what are still conventional weekday working hours.

The AHA also laments the limited notice and the manner in which this important change was announced. The short notice about this significant change was in and of itself inconvenient to researchers and insensitive to NARA's constituencies. As you are aware, many scholars use NARA research rooms during summer months and plan their trips well in advance. The announcement was made on Twitter and nowhere else, and given the nature of the medium, it was very short on details. Potential changes to provisions that allow public access to public resources should be prominently announced with sufficient advance notice to allow consultation with stakeholders and feedback from the public. I would encourage NARA to provide full information about the changes and to allow all users an opportunity to raise concerns.

Perhaps such consultation might yield a compromise. Even two Saturdays/month is better than none.

Sincerely,



James Grossman
Executive Director