

January 23, 2020

Mr. Russell Vought  
Acting Director  
Office of Management and Budget

Public Buildings Reform Board  
fastainfo@pbrb.gov

Dear Mr. Vought and members of the Public Buildings Reform Board:

The American Historical Association expresses concern about the Public Buildings Reform Board's recommendation to the Office of Management and Budget for the closure and sale of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) facility in Seattle. At this facility NARA maintains and provides access to millions of permanent records created by federal agencies and courts for Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington dating back to the 1840s—local access to which is vital to historians and the public in these states. We are writing to request that the Office of Management and Budget defer a decision on the closure and sale of this property until the full implications can be studied by NARA and sufficient time allowed for public comment.

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), alone among federal agencies, is dedicated to identifying, preserving, and providing permanent access to records that document our nation's history. The records that it preserves are essential to understanding and telling the story of our nation's life and governance. Citizens, students, and scholars use these records to verify their citizenship rights, to research family history, and to learn from the past. Drastic changes to NARA's operations have long-term consequences for researchers and for the ability of Americans to participate in democratic government.

While the AHA recognizes that the facility does not meet current standards and is in need of renovation, the report containing the recommendation provides no indication that input from NARA was considered, nor does it provide an impartial assessment of the consequences of this decision. Postponing the decision to allow NARA to fully study the impact of this decision is vital to ensure continued access to these records.

NARA will also require sufficient time to plan for continued preservation and access to collections housed in the Seattle facility. During the review period NARA should explore options for retaining the records in the region, rather than moving them to Missouri and Southern California as has been reported in the media. Such a move would remove them from the Pacific Northwest region where they originated, imposing unreasonable access burdens upon those who seek to use the materials. The closure of NARA's facility in Anchorage in 2014 led to the consolidation of records from the Pacific Northwest region in Seattle. Moving them further from their place of origin will likely undermine the expertise and professional management of the collection, which relies on staff who are knowledgeable about agencies and records relating to the Pacific Northwest. Moving the records far from their region of origin also increases the risk of agencies postponing indefinitely the transfer of the archives to NARA, further damaging the historical record. In addition, it will potentially fill those facilities, imposing costs that may possibly exceed any short-term savings.

The American Historical Association is concerned that the recommendation of the Public Buildings Reform Board has been made without adequate consultation with the relevant agencies or with the public

that uses the facility. Any irreversible decision, therefore, should be deferred until such time as a full study can be completed, all stakeholders are able provide input, and adequate time allowed for public comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Grossman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

James Grossman  
Executive Director

cc: Senator Patty Murray, Senator Maria Cantwell, Senator Daniel Sullivan, Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, Archivist of the United States David Ferriero