

TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE

INFORMATION POLICY, CENSUS AND NATIONAL ARCHIVES

SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE

OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE

ON

“STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL

PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS COMMISSION”

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Chairman William Lacy Clay, Ranking Minority Member Patrick McHenry, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Karen Jefferson, Records Manager at the Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, in Atlanta, Georgia. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss “Strengthening the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.”

The Woodruff Library is an independent non-profit library that provides the information needs of four historically black colleges in Atlanta, GA – Clark Atlanta University, The Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, and Spelman College. These four institutions have a combined student population of over 8,700 undergraduate and graduate students and over 700 faculty members.

The Woodruff Library includes an Archives Research Center with collections totaling over 7,000 linear feet including papers of individuals and families, and records of organizations and professional associations that document Black history and culture with a particular focus on the Southeastern United States. In addition, the Archives has institutional records documenting the history of the Atlanta University Center colleges and universities, and the contributions they have made to education since their inceptions in the 1860s.

You are probably most familiar with our library as the custodian for the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection that was acquired in 2006. The collection has been arranged, described, and digitized and is now available for research use. Our Archives is also the repository for the mayoral records of Maynard Jackson (1938 - 2003), who served as Mayor of Atlanta, GA for three terms in 1974-1982 and 1990-1994. Maynard Jackson was the first African American mayor of Atlanta, and was the youngest mayor and first African American mayor of a major Southern city.

I am speaking to you today as an archivist with 30 years experience in the profession. Before my tenure at the Woodruff Library, I worked at Howard University’s Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Duke University Libraries John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African American History and Culture. Helping to collect, preserve, and make accessible historical materials documenting American history is my passion for I know that the work I do as an archivist benefits our community and our nation today; and will benefit future generations far beyond my lifetime.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NHPRC

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) plays a vital role in the preservation of and access to America’s historical heritage. NHPRC is among the national leadership that helps ensure that our nation’s treasures are properly cared for and made accessible to the public. NHPRC provides leadership by helping to identify needs, establish national agendas, and provide support and funding to our

cultural and historical institutions to address the challenges in preserving our nation's history and expanding access to historical documentation to reach all our citizens.

NHPRC's grant program supports numerous projects to preserve and make accessible historical documentation of national significance, including the publications and preservation microfilming of papers of American icons such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Frederick Douglass, Thomas Edison and Susan B. Anthony, Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Sanger, Booker T, Washington and W.E.B. DuBois.

As important, NHPRC has established statewide networks that can identify and support institutions that have responsibility to care for historical documentation of local and regional significance. NHPRC's statewide entities include the State Historical Records Coordinators, the Council of State Archivists, and the State Historical Records Advisory Boards.

I will focus my remarks on the work of the State Records Historical Advisory Boards – affectionately known as SHRABs. And by example, I will more specifically talk about GHRAB, the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board and its work from which my institution and so many others in the State of Georgia have directly benefited.

GHRAB's mission is to:

- promote the educational use of Georgia's documentary heritage by all its citizens,
- evaluate and improve the condition of records,
- encourage statewide planning for preservation and access to Georgia's historical records,
- and advise the Secretary of State and the Georgia Archives on issues concerning records.

In meeting this mission, GHRAB maintains the *Directory of Historical and Cultural Organizations*. This online directory provides information on over 600 institutions statewide. It is a primary networking tool for archivists in Georgia. Also, educators, students, researchers, and the general public - locally, nationally and internationally - can easily use the directory to identify historical resources in Georgia.

GHRAB also manages a grants program that has a significant impact on the development of the archival enterprise within the State. The grants program has supported projects for arrangement, description, preservation, microfilming, digitization, staff training, planning, exhibits, improvement of storage facilities, and the establishment and development of records management and archival programs. In working with cultural and historical institutions, GHRAB is able to identify crucial, yet basic projects and provide funding for which few if any other funders would give support. GHRAB grant awards are generally between \$2,000 and \$15,000. Although small by some standards, these awards have been vital for many small and mid-size institutions, who

may not have the resources to prepare proposals that compete successfully with more established and larger institutions.

The Woodruff Library received one of these small awards for \$4,400. With these funds we were able to hire student workers and purchase supplies to inventory and properly house selected holdings that includes art, photographs, 19th century newspapers, maps; and posters documenting historical cultural events, national and local electoral campaigns, and civil rights activities. This basic inventory unearthed historical treasures that were previously inaccessible. Also our sister institution, the Spelman College Archives, received a grant award for \$9,000 for preservation microfilming of the correspondence and diaries of the colleges' founders.

GHRAB funding supports educational opportunities within the State, and this training is thereby more accessible to and less expensive for Georgians. Our staff has participated in many of these workshops. This training increases staff knowledge and skills and keeps staff abreast of best practices and standards in caring for historical materials. There have been workshops on preservation, arrangement and description, records management, disaster planning, managing electronic records and digitizing historical materials. Such training opportunities have become even more critical as computer technologies are more fully integrated into the creation of and access to historical records.

Today the majority of records being created are born digital and our citizens increasingly expect to access information electronically. Archival institutions have the responsibility to ensure that these electronic records are preserved and accessible for today and for the future. This requires the ability to re-format paper and analog audiovisual materials to digital formats; and to ensure that information captured digitally is accessible as computer technologies change. Therefore it is essential that archival professionals are knowledgeable and skilled to meet these opportunities, challenges and demands related to electronic records. Through GHRAB funding, Georgians have had several opportunities to participate in training in digitization of historical materials and managing electronic records.

One of the most effective programs supported by GHRAB was the Circuit Rider Archivist Program that was implemented from 2005-2008. Through this program a professional archivist provided onsite consultation to over 100 organizations in 74 counties across Georgia. This program brought expertise to small, mid-size, and newly developing institutions that may not have had the resources to hire a professional consultant. These onsite consultations provided guidance for institutions to develop plans to improve their archival programs in areas such as strategic planning, effective policies and procedures, inventorying and preparing collections for research access, implementing preservation measures for the long-term care of collections, and creating disaster preparedness plans.

GHRAB grant funds not only support our efforts to care for and make accessible our historical heritage, this funding also provides job opportunities. Archival work is labor

intensive, and often a significant portion of the budget in grant-funded projects is devoted to staff salaries and wages. In the archival field, grant-funded projects often provide jobs for recent graduates of archival programs. These jobs provide graduates with work experience that enhances their ability to compete for full-time employment that often requires a minimum of one to three years work experience. My library recently transitioned a project archivist to a full-time staff position. Also, grant-funded projects provide opportunities for students and others to work in archives, exposing them to the archival field as a career option, and leading some to pursue educational programs to become professional archivists. Currently there are four students pursuing graduate studies in archival management that were hired through grant-funded projects at our library.

CONCLUSION

These examples of the profound impact that GHRAB has made on local cultural and historical institutions in the preservation of and access to our historical legacy is replicated by the other SHRABs throughout the nation. GHRAB's budget is provided through grants from the NHPRC and appropriations from the State of Georgia. GHRAB has only received \$2.4 million over the life of its 17 years of operation (1993-2010). In 2010 and 2011, the State is providing no financial support for GHRAB. Should NHPRC's federal appropriations decline, there will be little to no funding for SHRAB's and the important work that GHRAB is doing in preservation and access of historical materials may come to an end.

Our cultural and historical institutions have a responsibility and an obligation to insure that the American experience and historical legacy is documented, preserved and made accessible to U.S. citizens and the global community. Despite the economic challenges of today, we cannot devalue the importance of this responsibility to our society. NHPRC has a proven record of success. And through its network of state boards, NHPRC exemplifies effective partnership between federal and state governments that successfully impacts local communities. I urge you to not only continue but increase appropriations for NHPRC so that the progress that has been made in preserving the record of the great American experience in democracy will be available for today, and for future generations.

On behalf of the students, faculty and staff of the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library, I thank you for this opportunity to speak. NHPRC is important, the funding that you can allocate will go a very long way to preserve and cherish the histories of the people of the United States of America.