

June 17, 2020

Via email to: Manny Geraldo, Esq.
Legislative & Committee Director
Office of Councilmember Brandon Todd

To: Councilmember Brandon Todd, Chair
Committee on Government Operations
Council of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC

Written Testimony by Katharina Hering on the Office of Public Records

Dear Councilmember Todd and Government Operations Committee members:

My name is Katharina Hering, and I am the long-time secretary and currently acting president of the Friends of the DC Archives (FDCA). I am also a professional archivist and am active with the Society of American Archivists, the oldest and largest archivist association in North America. The FDCA are a group of archivists, records managers, and other engaged citizens who advocate for the DC Archives. Our goals are: upgrading the physical plant and increasing the staff at the current Archives at Naylor Court; creating a new state-of-the-art Archives for the District; supporting the OPR staff in preparing for the move to the new facility, and strengthening DC's records management program, including the electronic records management component.

I want to begin by acknowledging the work of Rebecca Katz and her staff at the OPR, including William Branch, who have worked hard to serve many researchers at the Naylor Court facility and manage the District's records, despite of OPR's limited funding and inadequate facility. Recent accomplishments include the creation of a small supervised reading room, an ongoing box-by-box inventory of the records at Naylor Court, and the successful review and update of the retention schedules from most government agencies. While Naylor Court remained physically closed due to the pandemic, the archives staff made a considerable effort to remain virtually accessible to researchers.

However, as my FDCA colleagues have also stated in their testimonies, OPR's funding and staffing (5 FTEs plus one on detail) is utterly inadequate in national and international comparison. For instance, based on the 2019 edition of the *State of State Records* survey by the Council of State Archivists,¹ the Maryland State Archives – which manages a comparable volume of records as DC is expected to manage – has a staff of 75, including 5 FTE dedicated to

records management, and the Virginia State Archives has 51 FTE, including 10.5 dedicated to records management.

Especially urgent is the need to increase OPRs records management staff. Currently, only one full time staff member at the OPR is dedicated to records management and oversees the implementation of the retention schedules of DCs 80+ agencies. This is utterly inadequate – the OPR urgently needs more professional full-time records managers to work with and help train the agency liaisons, and ensure the documentation and preservation of DC’s records, including records created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the Black Lives Matter protests in the past weeks. The proposed 10 percent cut of OPR’s FY2021 records management budget is not acceptable. We urge the DC Council to restore and increase OPRs budget and ensure funding of at least two additional FTE’s dedicated to records management, including electronic records management. Records management is important for many reasons: in addition to providing the foundation to preservation of DCs historical legacy, it is vital to ensure good governance, transparency and efficient management of the DC government.

I also want to support the excellent proposal to convene an Archives facility round table, which should bring together all stakeholders to ensure the proper planning and speedy development of a new state of the art Archives facility for the District of Columbia.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Katharina Hering

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¹ Council of State Archivists, The State of State Records: A Statistical Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs in the United States, 2019 edition, based on the 2018 survey, section 1.5: staffing, <https://www.statearchivists.org/resource-center/cosa-reports-projects-and-surveys/state-arm-surveys/>