

Preserving and Accessing Maryland's History

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Public Safety and Administration
House Appropriations
Maryland House of Delegates

by Dr. Edward C. Papenfuse, Jr., State Archivist
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on the Proposed Budget for the Maryland State Archives for FY 2004

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

My name is Ed Papenfuse, Archivist of the State of Maryland. With me this afternoon is Tim Baker, Deputy Archivist, and Van Lewis, Director of Fiscal Administration.

The Managing for Results submission for the Maryland State Archives provides a good description of our mission and, I believe, speaks well to the organization's goals and objectives. The MFR process has allowed us to bring sharp focus to achieving measurable results in those areas that are most important to fulfilling our mission. Please permit me the opportunity to begin by providing an overview of the Archives' mission and laying out some of the major activities and issues for Fiscal Year 2004.

The Archives is the central depository for Maryland Government records, and certain designated private collections, of permanent value. The goals of our principle program DA10.01 respond to the core requirements of the Agency to:

- Serve as the custodian of the State's permanent records and collections
- Describe government
- Provide intellectual interpretation.

Essential to fulfilling these requirements are the necessary prerequisites of space – both physical space for storage of permanent hardcopy records and electronic archival storage for security backup of certain records.

The MFR provides some detail on physical storage capacity so I will not go into specifics. Let me just draw a fine point on a couple of items. The Archives cannot effectively utilize all of the warehouse storage that is available, because of lack of funding for shelving. In addition, the total amount of warehouse space is inadequate to take material out of expensive office environments and put them into less expensive space because of a lack of funding for additional leased space. Just six months into this fiscal year, we have already received requests for transfers that exceed projections for the entire year. The bottom line is more attention needs to be paid throughout state government to effective records management especially in a time of fiscal constraint.

The next prerequisite, electronic archival storage, involves a modest investment in information technology (IT). For FY 2003, the Archives budget for IT was eliminated. The FY 2004 allowance

offers no relief. To not have any general fund dollars with which to replace or repair even a reasonable amount of IT equipment is simply untenable.

There is one other important prerequisite necessary to achieving our goals. That is people. We have at the Archives a staff that is one of the most dedicated and competent in state government. This past summer I was forced to cut nine positions - - a very significant percentage of our total staff complement. These necessary actions, taken in advance of any DBM directive, have had a significant impact on our ability to provide core services.

The Archives' FY 2004 General Fund Allowance stands at only 95% of the FY 2001 level. Cost constraint measures imposed by the Department of Budget and Management reduced the Agency's FY 2002 General Fund Appropriation by \$115,000. \$101,000 of this amount is attributed to additional turnover being assessed against the Agency. In the current fiscal year, this "attrition measure," over and above budgeted turnover, balloons to a \$152,489 reduction in general funds. In addition, the Archives is slated to lose another \$138,284 in general funds this year to help mitigate the State general fund deficit. In the FY 2004 allowance, an additional \$101,855 in general fund reductions is levied upon the Archives as these other reductions roll forward.

How have these general fund reductions impacted the Archives? Here are a few highlights:

- The current general fund allowance is scarcely enough to satisfy salaries, rent, allocated costs, and Treasurer master lease costs. Every other critical need will go unfulfilled unless special fund revenue can shoulder the burden.
- Funding for maintenance and printing of the Maryland Manual has been eliminated.
- The Commission to Coordinate the Study, Commemoration, and Impact of Slavery's History and Legacy in Maryland was created by the General Assembly to support the preservation, cataloguing, and presentation of cultural resources relevant to the history and legacy of slavery in Maryland. All funding for the Commission, with the exception of the salary for the Director, has been relinquished.

Our Legislative Analyst has described the Archives as existing in "survival mode." "Austere" is the term he has used to describe the Archives' budget. I concur with that assessment.

Yet, we maintain focus on our goals. We have performed critical evaluations of services and functions. In some areas, particularly Reference Services, we have had to cut back considerably. Despite the fact that the public has come to expect exceptional service from our Reference Archivists, we have had to re-evaluate the level of service we are capable of providing. Our objective has been to accelerate efforts to place finding aides on line to allow the public the opportunity to perform some of the research required to access public records.

An example of what I am describing here involves our reference work on vital records (birth and death records) materials. A considerable amount of our reference staff time is spent on researching and locating vital records. The fact is that we have only been able to keep up with those requests for records that serve an important legal requirement. The backlog of all other requests has been steadily growing to the point of being unmanageable. As of last week we suspended all research associated with non-legal vital record research and are having our staff focus attention toward bringing online the indices that allow one to search for a vital record. Once these indices are online,

the public can search for themselves, saving the money that they may have had to pay for research. It will also free up our staff to perform other activities.

Before I close, I want to bring you up to date on some other matters of interest.

National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)

Last year I reported to the Subcommittee on Health and Human Services that we were attempting to work with the FBI NICS staff and our Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to identify funds to perform the work associated with this federal program. By way of background, the staff at the FBI NICS find references to arrests of individuals through criminal justice information systems. However, these information resources do not show the disposition of some cases. The verdict can only be determined through examination of the criminal case docket. These dockets are permanent records, many of which are stored at the Archives. Extensive research, including frequent contact with the courts, is necessary to locate dockets and determine a disposition. All of this must be accomplished and reported within the 72 hours allotted by law for NICS to respond to the inquiries they receive.

I am pleased to report that working with DPSCS we have been able to secure funding for this federal mandate through December of 2003. We have also been allocated one Administrative Assistant I position to begin the task of researching those records for which disposition data is missing. DPSCS, the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Archives will work collaboratively this Spring on a federal grant proposal to continue this project beyond December of 2003.

Plats.net

Today, I am pleased to report that we have completed the scanning work for the core of *plats.net* (phase I) and have installed *plats.net* in all of Maryland's Circuit Courts. This morning there are 666,335 database entries providing access to 580,775 oversized plat images that are posted on-line, a collection of electronically accessible records that is roughly 226Gb in size.

Public response to the system indicates we, and I mean both the courts and the Archives when I say we, have been enormously successful. Last month there were 85,346 requests for platted materials from the site. During the last quarter there were 243,129 requests. Sixty-two percent of those requests were from outside the court. Utilization of the *plats.net* site has grown by 338% during the past two years.

Plats.net is an excellent example of the Archives working in partnership with another agency, (in this case another branch of our government), to provide exceptional service while fulfilling our mandate to preserve and provide access to Maryland's history. The oversized plated material is now safely ensconced at the Archives, while the public has immediate access to these important legal documents without having to involve courthouse staff with record retrieval – truly a win/win for all.

Finally, let me speak for a moment about our responsibility as the custodians of Maryland's artistic and fine arts collection. The State-owned fine arts collections - the Annapolis Collection and the Peabody Collection - are valuable artistic and cultural assets to the State, its citizens, and the nation.

Representing three centuries of Maryland history, as well as American and European art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these collections are made accessible to the public through exhibitions within the Annapolis complex, and online through the Archives' website.

In Fiscal Year 2001, the General Assembly appropriated \$30,000 for a conservation assessment of the Annapolis Collection, and in Fiscal Year 2002, another \$30,000 to assess the Peabody Collection. Conducted in 2001, these surveys documented the critical need for conservation in order to preserve the collections for future generations. Based on survey results, conservation has been planned based on the condition of the objects (poor, fair, or good). Items in poor condition are to be given first priority for treatment.

The Archives has made repeated requests for funds to conserve these items. Unfortunately, not only have there been no funds made available for conservation, we have a pre-existing deficit with respect to the proper storage of the collection and any funds that had heretofore used for exhibits has been relinquished.

Usually I come before you with examples of some of the precious documents we have preserved and made available over the past year. Given your tight time schedule, permit me to defer that to our online annual report to be available before the end of Session.

To sum up, the Archives ability to survive the current economic hardship is predicated on our ability to partner with other State agencies and the Judiciary to provide services that fulfill our mission and, at the same time, add value and advance the interests and activities of our sister agencies. To date, we have been quite successful. Part of that success has been attributable to the support from members of the General Assembly. I appreciate that support.

With that I will answer any questions.