



July 12, 2017

The Honorable David S. Ferriero
Archivist of the United States
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408

Dear Mr. Ferriero,

It was recently announced that the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) will be ending Saturday research room hours at the main Archives building in Washington and Archives II in College Park, Maryland beginning July 22, 2017.

We know that the National Archives has sustained serious budget cuts over the past few years that require a reassessment of the allocation of resources. As you know, the National Coalition for History and our member organizations have been advocating for many years on the agency's behalf to Congress and the Obama and Trump administrations regarding underfunding.

One of the main rationales provided for eliminating Saturday hours is that usage has been declining over recent years. While that may be the case, the historians, researchers, students, genealogists and the general public who avail themselves of these hours likely do so because they are juggling other commitments such as a full-time job, school or family. We feel one of the unintended consequences of this proposal may be a disproportionate impact on those without the ability or resources to devote themselves to full-time research. At a time when life-long learning is more important than ever, two of the nation's premier historical research facilities should not be limiting public access to their records. In addition, many often plan trips to Washington to do concentrated research over a limited amount of time and they will be detrimentally impacted as well.

Goal 1 of NARA's 2014 strategic plan states, "Make Access Happen establishes 'public access' as NARA's core purpose. It affirms that public access is the ultimate outcome of all of our work." While we appreciate your extending weekday hours and increasing the number of pull times, it simply does not make up for the elimination of a weekend day. The argument that Saturday hours are of limited use to researchers because there are no files pulled is not valid. Your staff informs us that materials pulled on a weekday can be held to be worked with on Saturday. Often, the National Archives is the only facility in the country where many records can be found. If the full Saturday hours cannot be retained, we would urge you to at least consider having these facilities open a minimum of two Saturdays a month especially during busy summer months

We must also take issue with the way the announcement of this change of schedule was handled. This decision will affect thousands of researchers, yet very little notice was initially given and a detailed press release was only issued yesterday, a little more than a week before the changes are to go in effect. The National Coalition for History represents a diverse number of groups

400 A Street, SE Washington, DC 20003

T 202.544.2422 x 116 F 202.544.8307 E lwhite@historycoalition.org

www.historycoalition.org

representing historians, archivists, researchers, teachers, students, documentary editors, genealogists, political scientists, and other stakeholders. Goal 2 of your strategic plan states, “Connect with Customers challenges us to continuously improve customer service, cultivate public participation, and generate new understanding of the importance of records in a democracy. We will continuously engage with and learn from our customers—individuals, organizations, and other Federal agencies.” Yet there was no outreach to the historical community whatsoever, nor were we given an opportunity to comment on these proposed changes beforehand.

In conclusion, we ask you to reconsider the elimination of Saturday research hours. If the full Saturday hours cannot be retained, we would urge you to at least consider having these facilities open a minimum of two Saturdays a month. In addition, given the lack of notice given to affected parties, we would urge you to consider postponing the effective date of this decision to give those who are planning to come to Washington to do research time to make alternative plans.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Alan Kraut, Ph.D
President



Lee White
Executive Director