

TO: Mr. Russell T. Vought, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget
Via Email: Russell.t.vought@omb.eop.gov

FROM: Council of State Archivists and Society of American Archivists

SUBJ: **Opposition to Proposed Closure of NATIONAL ARCHIVES Facility in SEATTLE**

DATE: January 30, 2020

The Council of State Archivists and the Society of American Archivists support the Congressional delegations of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington in opposing the recommended closure of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) facility in Seattle, Washington. We strongly recommend that the decision to close the facility be rescinded and that the recommendation be studied further, including asking for input from stakeholders and the public. We further recommend that NARA continue to have a branch facility in the Pacific Northwest to serve researchers and federal agencies.

The Federal Public Buildings Reform Board (PBRB), created by Congress in 2016 to identify and dispose of high-value federal real estate based primarily on its financial value and readiness for sale, recommended the sale of a General Services Administration (GSA) building that houses both the **National Archives at Seattle** and the **Seattle Federal Records Center**. The [PBRB report](#) was submitted to OMB on December 27, 2019, and OMB announced its approval of the recommendation on January 24, 2020. This was a *very* short timeframe for a decision of this significance, especially with no previous opportunity for public comment while the PBRB gathered information for its report. We echo the Congressional representatives of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, who outlined in a [January 24 letter](#) to OMB the many problems with this decision.

OMB's approval of the PBRB's recommendation means that NARA will close both the National Archives at Seattle and the Seattle Federal Records Center and will no longer maintain a facility in Seattle. The law that created the PBRB (the [Federal Asset Sales and Transfer Act](#), or "FASTA") requires NARA to vacate the building after OMB approves the PBRB's recommendation. The PBRB recommendation and the OMB approval to sell this building are not based on NARA's consent or conditions, nor on input from stakeholders and researchers; state, local, or tribal governments; or federal government agencies that use NARA's services at this facility.

CoSA and SAA strongly believe that NARA should maintain a facility in the Pacific Northwest. The National Archives has operated the National Archives at Seattle and the Federal Records Center for more than fifty years. This facility contains both archival records and active records from federal government agencies located in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. The PBRB report indicates that the archival records now in the National Archives at Seattle will be moved to a facility near Riverside, California, and the federal agency records in the Seattle Federal Records Center will be moved to Kansas City, Missouri.

The closure of the National Archives at Seattle will have a significantly adverse impact on researchers in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest states, as it is the primary access point for viewing thousands of original federal records (such as maps, photographs, documents, and government records) that are unavailable elsewhere. The facility also houses the records of numerous federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. District Court, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Those records concern the history of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, tribal history, and the history of each of the states, as well as issues of contemporary interest including land use, water use, and mining. A lack of reasonable access to records in the region will severely impede efforts to ensure government transparency.

Additionally, the 272 federally recognized tribes in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska use archival records at the facility, including materials relating to mid-19th century treaty negotiations, drafts of treaties, and records from lawsuits on treaty rights and tribal lands.

State archives and other archival repositories routinely refer researchers to this facility and NARA staff members, in turn, refer researchers to other archives in the region. Researchers may include journalists, authors, attorneys, historians, genealogists, scientists, and government agencies at all levels of government, including state, tribal, and local. Moving the records so far from this region would restrict direct access to them and cause significant hardship for researchers. Consider that a Seattle-based researcher would have to travel 978 miles to use Pacific Northwest archival records housed in Riverside.

We note also that the records from the National Archives at Anchorage, Alaska, were moved to Seattle when the Anchorage facility closed in 2014. The proposed closure in Seattle would require Alaskan researchers to travel some 3,600 miles to conduct research. Not only would the Alaska materials be farther out of reach for researchers, students, attorneys, government agencies, and others, but the proposed closure would likely delay the digitization of Alaska records promised by NARA when it closed the facility in Anchorage.

Records Center costs for records that are now stored at the Seattle Federal Records Center will increase. For federal agencies headquartered in Seattle that now send active records to the Seattle Federal Records Center, the transfer would no longer involve a short drive halfway across town. In the future, active records used by these agencies would be shipped more than 2,000 miles—at great expense—to a NARA records center in Kansas City, Missouri. Shipping charges would be an additional cost for federal agencies in the three other states as well.

We urge OMB to rescind its approval of the PBRB recommendation to sell this building—and thus force the National Archives at Seattle and the Seattle Federal Records Center to close. This decision was reached without consultation with any stakeholders, including the states, tribes, or agencies concerned or with researchers and other members of the public. We support the Senators and Members of Congress from Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington who requested that this matter be examined fully with input from concerned stakeholders and with the full range of costs outlined.

About CoSA and SAA

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) is a nonprofit membership organization of the state and territorial government archives in the fifty states, five territories, and District of Columbia. Through collaborative research, education, and advocacy, CoSA provides leadership that strengthens and supports state and territorial archives in their work to preserve and provide access to government records, protecting the rights and historical documents of the American people. Read more at www.statearchivists.org or contact CoSA Executive Director Barbara Teague at info@statearchivists.org.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) is the oldest and largest national professional association of archivists in North America, representing more than 6,000 archivists employed by businesses, universities, governments, libraries, and historical organizations. Archivists are the professionals who collect, preserve, and make available for research historically significant documents, vital records, and other materials. Read more at www.archivists.org or contact SAA Executive Director Nancy Beaumont at nbeaumont@archivists.org.

