



February 25, 2026

The Honorable Louis DiPalma
Chair, Senate Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: RI State History Center – FY2027 budget, Article 6 Question 6

To Chair DiPalma and the members of the Senate Committee on Finance:

I write today in support of the proposal included in the Governor’s budget for the Rhode Island State History Center, funded by \$45 million of the general obligation bond in question 6. As an original colony, Rhode Island is fortunate to have a rich and storied history, and to have played an integral role in the American Revolution.

Unfortunately, Rhode Islanders are not afforded the benefit of a permanent space in which they can experience the State Archives’ treasures up close. Instead, they are kept out of sight for preservation purposes. We should be able to have both – and a State History Center with dedicated, safe exhibit space for our archival materials meets that need.

Not only would this benefit Rhode Islanders – students on field trips, local historians, and so many others – but it would serve as a tourism driver and capitalize on what we know is a booming historic tourism industry.

As a twenty-year educator who taught 8th grade social studies, I know the importance of having historical artifacts available for students. They provide immersive, hands-on experiences which bring history to life. They provide students with ways to engage with history beyond a typical classroom experience. Rhode Island’s notable treasures to be accessible to all Rhode Islanders and Rhode Island students should have the opportunity to engage with the amazing collection of the State Archives.

As we recognize our nation’s semiquincentennial anniversary, the State History Center is an ideal project to leave a lasting legacy on our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary K. Barden".

Mary K. Barden
Executive Director
National Education Association Rhode Island