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Via email to: Aimellia Siemson
Office Counsel & Deputy Committee Director
Office of At-Large Councilmember Anita Bonds
Chair of Committee on Housing and Executive Administration

To: Councilmember Anita Bonds, Chair
Committee on Housing and Executive Administration
Council of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC

Testimony by Katharina Hering on the Office of Public Records, Office of the Secretary of the District of Columbia

Dear Chair Bonds, dear committee members:

My name is Katharina Hering, and I am the president and long-time secretary of the Friends of the DC Archives (FDCA). I am also a professional archivist and digital archives specialist.

The FDCA are a group of archivists, record managers, and other engaged citizens who advocate for the DC Archives, we established the group in 2014. 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 creation of the Archives Advisory Group by the DC Council. This group is an important step forward in supporting the development of a new state of the art archival facility at UDC.

I appreciate the testimony by Secretary Bassett, acknowledging the progress and the successful inventory of the records at Naylor Court, and the update of the retention schedules of 60 government agencies. I also want to acknowledge the progress in contracting the design for the new archival facility at UDC.

At the same time, I want to highlight that much needs to be done to prepare the archives for the move. There is a long way to go, not only in the construction of the new building, but also in developing the operational capacity of the archives. Particularly desperate is the staffing situation. Prior to 2020, the archives had a very small staff of 6 FTE. In reality, the staff is

currently down to 4 employees, and the Public Records Administrator/State Archivist position, open since the fall of 2020, has not been filled yet. The staff is professional, dedicated, and hard-working, but the current staff is much too small to adequately serve researchers at the current facility – and the staffing will in no way be sufficient to operate a new state-of-the-art-facility and program.

Just to give you a comparison, the Maryland State Archives, which manages a similar volume of records that the District is supposed to manage, has a staff of 71 people;¹ my hometown of Berlin in Germany, another capital city state, has a staff of 75 people. If the development of a new facility and the move shall succeed, the staffing at the OPR urgently needs to be increased, and this needs to start right now.

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 plus agencies. This is utterly inadequate – the OPR urgently needs more professional full-time records managers to work with the agencies, implement training programs, and ensure the documentation and preservation of DC’s records, including the electronic records. As an immediate step, I urge the Mayor to 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 – it not only provides the foundation to preserve DCs historical legacy, but it is also vital to ensure good governance, transparency and efficient management of the DC government. I also urge to hire staff to develop and professionally manage a digital asset management system for the District’s official records, and much of these records are electronic now.

These valuable digital records need to be managed professionally, including the video recordings of the ongoing performance oversight hearings. Expanding the operational capacity of the Office of Public Records needs to start now and cannot wait until the new facility is built.

Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Katharina Hering

¹ Council of State Archivists, The State of State Records, 2021 edition, page A 78, table 28: Full Time Employees by Division, <https://www.statearchivists.org/research-resources/cosa-reports-surveys>