



State of Rhode Island

Department of State | Office of the Secretary of State

Nellie M. Gorbea, *Secretary of State*

March 8, 2021

The Honorable Kathleen A. Fogarty, Chairwoman
House Special Legislation Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairwoman Fogarty:

I am writing regarding House bill 5781 introduced by Chairwoman Williams that proposes establishing an Elected and Appointed Minority Officials Commission, whose purpose is to establish a permanent record of state and municipal elected and appointed minority officials dating back to the state's founding.

The Department of State is responsible for operating the State Archives, the repository for official permanent records of Rhode Island state government.

The Archives has three primary objectives:

- To advance the Rhode Island Department of State's mission to engage and empower all Rhode Islanders by making government more accessible and transparent and encouraging civic pride
- To assist Rhode Island residents in learning about their history and increase awareness of Rhode Island's history
- To ensure transparency and accessibility by conserving and preserving records and making them available to the public through exhibitions, public programs, and digital initiatives.

Since taking office, Secretary Gorbea has made it a priority to bring the history of our state to the residents of Rhode Island. This has been accomplished by hosting events and exhibits that highlight the strengths of our diversity and the impact of political, business and community leaders on the growth of our state.

While the past year has prevented the Archives from hosting in-person events, we brought the history of our state to the public virtually. We created a virtual tour of the Archives, posted interviews online with artists celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment and Black History Month. The Archives also conducted virtual genealogy and archiving workshops to continue providing information to Rhode Islanders.

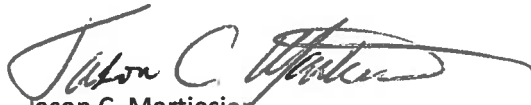
As we look at the purpose of the Commission, it appears to fit nicely with the mission of the Archives as it relates to the permanent records of state elected and appointed minority officials. We have many of these records for state officials and it would be beneficial to have Commission members assist our office in identifying all the minority officials addressed in the legislation.

The one concern we have with the legislation is the “unrestricted access” to the collection. The State Archives collection has documents dating back to 1636, including the state’s copy of the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights stored in a secure, climate-controlled vault. While documents in the Archives collection are available for the public to view, and we would be happy to work with the Commission on providing access, we want to ensure proper protections are always in place to adequately preserve the documents in the Archives collection.

We look forward to working with Chairwoman Williams on this legislation and with the Commission, if it is enacted into law, to highlight the many minority elected and appointed officials that have made an impact in the State of Rhode Island.

Thank you for the opportunity submit testimony on House bill 5781 and thank you to Vice Chairwoman Williams for bringing this important issue to the forefront.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason C. Martiesian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jason C. Martiesian
Director of State & Federal Legislative Affairs and Policy

c. The Honorable Anastasia Williams
House Special Legislation Committee members