

**Keith W. Stokes**  
**25 Vernon Avenue**  
**Newport, Rhode Island 02840**  
[keithnpt@gmail.com](mailto:keithnpt@gmail.com)

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To Chair Representative Marvin Abney and the Members of the House Committee on Finance

Re: Article 6: Capital Development Program – Question 6

I am writing today to strongly support the proposal in the Governor's budget for the Rhode Island State History Center, which is funded by a \$45 million general obligation bond in question 6.

Rhode Island, one of the original colonies, boasts a rich and storied history, playing a significant role in the American Revolution. I am fortunate to have a deep connection to my Newport ancestors, who played important roles in the patriotic causes of their time. The Rhode Island History Center is dedicated to ensuring that all residents have access to the significant contributions made by men and women from all walks of life.

It's truly unfortunate that Rhode Islanders don't have a permanent space to connect with the state's treasures up close. Instead, these valuable items are kept hidden away for preservation, which can be disappointing for those eager to experience our history. It's important that we find a way to offer both: a State History Center that provides a dedicated and safe space for our archival materials, so that everyone in Rhode Island can see and appreciate these treasures. We all deserve to engage meaningfully with our state's rich history. Not only would a State History Center benefit the people of Rhode Island—students on field trips, local historians, and many others—but it would also promote the state's fastest-growing tourism segment: heritage and cultural tourism.

As the State Historian Laureate, I am charged by state law to inspire fellow Rhode Island residents and institutions to celebrate and advance our rich history, heritage, and culture. A Rhode Island History Center would empower residents with direct access to public records, documents, and artifacts, deepening their connection to our past and nurturing a strong sense of identity and purpose within our community.

As we mark our nation's semi-quincentennial, the State History Center is an ideal project to leave a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Keith Stokes



Rhode Island Historian Laureate