

To Marvin Abney and the Members of the Rhode Island House 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. I offer this support from the perspective of someone who works every day at the intersection of archives, education, and the public. I am the founder of *On This Day in Rhode Island History*, a professor of history at Johnson & Wales University and Roger Williams University, a board member of The Cocumscussoc Association, and the Public History Program Manager at Rose Island Lighthouse. In these roles, I see firsthand how hungry Rhode Islanders and visitors are for meaningful access to the state's documentary and material heritage.

As an original British colony, Rhode Island is fortunate to possess a rich and complicated history and to have played an integral role in the American Revolution and the making of the United States. Yet the very collections that allow us to tell those stories are often inaccessible to the public because there is no permanent, purpose-built facility in which preservation and exhibition can coexist. We should be able to do both. A State History Center would provide safe, climate-controlled spaces for stewardship while finally giving Rhode Islanders the opportunity to see their shared history up close.

For students especially, the impact would be transformative. It would give me the opportunity to bring classes into historic spaces and work with young people encountering primary sources for the first time. Nothing compares to the moment when a document or artifact collapses the distance between past and present. A History Center would multiply those moments for K-12 groups, college students, researchers, families, and lifelong learners across the state.

The benefits would extend well beyond education. Rhode Island already thrives on heritage tourism. A visible, central home for the state's collections would serve as a gateway, directing visitors outward to local museums, historic houses, and cultural institutions, strengthening the entire preservation economy.

As we approach the nation's semiquincentennial, the State History Center is exactly the kind of forward-looking investment that honors our past while building long-term public value. It is an opportunity to create access, deepen understanding, and leave a lasting legacy for future generations of Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your consideration,



Michael J. Simpson, M.A., A.M.

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