

March 5, 2026

Alex Marszalkowski
Chairman, House Finance Subcommittee for General Government
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Chairman Marszalkowski,

Thank you for taking the time to review my testimony for the proposed state archives building for the Department of State and the Office of its Secretary. I support the development of the complex; however, I have reservations about the location.

As reported by the Providence Journal in September 2025¹, the feasibility study found, “The State Street site to be the best option, because it is elevated from the street and would ‘enliven’ the central plaza ‘completing the ensemble of buildings on Capitol Hill,’” with the limit to that site being the need to build a separate parking structure, and the only “loss” the green space in front of the William E. Powers building.

I will suggest to you that building a parking structure is not a loss, but an investment. An investment in the state’s workforce, which has for years had insufficient parking at Capitol Hill, and in investment in public participation, since the legislature generally meets after the executive branch has gone home, and those spaces could be used by the public coming to the State House to testify. As of now, the public is generally limited to an insufficient number of paid parking meters around the building, which are generally absorbed by professionals coming to lobby and advocate legislature themselves.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State seeks to have the archives on that site to facilitate K-12 educational visits; however, as anyone who works on that hill can tell you, even with the pedestrian infrastructure in place, it is no always safe to cross and will require additional investments from the state to improve, as Smith street is also Route 44. For those coming to engage the legislature in the evening, it can be quite dangerous, as demonstrated by the incident involving the Honorable Richard Licht.

Additionally, the only “loss” cited for the Powers building site, it the green space in front, if the archives were placed there, which would require an additional surface parking lot, at least based on the publicly available renderings of the concept. I ask that you take a ride down Smith Street. Because of the age of the developments, it is a wall of commercial sites, with almost no reprieve to breathe. There are neighborhoods just over the highway, and families live there. I think the loss of that green space is substantial’ once it’s gone, it’s gone forever.

I would ask the legislature to build the archive, but to site it on the State Street location, and make the investment in its workforce, in participatory democracy, and in Providence, by enlivening Capitol Hill,

¹ <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/politics/state/2025/09/25/new-ri-state-archives-could-be-built-in-providence-by-2030/86294913007/>

maintaining the green space, and improving the pedestrian crossing for safety. The value of that over time well exceeds the cost of replacing one of Providence's sea of surface parking lots, with a parking structure.

With Respect,

T. Donahue
Providence