

**Keith Stokes**  
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**Newport, RI 02840**

Senator Louis P. DiPalma  
Chair – Senate Finance Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Senator DiPalma:

I am here today in my capacity as State Historian Laureate 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 thirteen colonies, has a rich and storied history and played a significant role in the American Revolution. I am fortunate to have a deep connection to my Jewish ancestors from Newport, who made essential contributions to the patriotic causes of their time. Another ancestor from Newport went on to become the first person of color elected to the Rhode Island General Assembly and was a leader in the Newport Centennial celebration in 1876. The Rhode Island History Center will serve as an essential public resource, allowing all residents to access the significant contributions of men and women from various backgrounds.

Unfortunately, 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. We must 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 celebrate our nation's Semi-Quincentennial in 2026, the State History Center stands as a remarkable opportunity to forge a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Keith W. Stokes