

**Testimony Before the House Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing, March 12, 2014**

Richard Marek, Vermont Historical Society

Good Afternoon. I am Richard Marek, 1st Vice President of the Vermont Historical Society and I am here today to comment upon our organization's FY2016 appropriation. As a former member of the legislature I have a deep appreciation for the challenges you currently face and understand the limited options you have. I am hopeful the information I provide today will be helpful to you.

Since it was chartered by the State of Vermont in 1838 the Vermont Historical Society has been a beneficial partner with the state. We have taken our responsibility as stewards of the state's historical collections very seriously and are proud of the many ways we are of service to agencies of state government.

By sharing space at the Vermont History Center with the Division for Historic Preservation we allow the state to provide better care and public access to the state's archaeological resources, while also saving the state tens of thousands of dollars each year in rent and operating expenses that were incurred before this partnership.

We provide quality meeting space free of charge at the History Center to state agencies, which would cost \$13,000-15,000 each year if rented at our regular rate. While we welcome these groups to our facilities, it comes with a definite cost to us for staffing, facilities operations and wear and tear on furniture and equipment. The increased use of this room by state agencies also has reduced the availability of the space for paid rentals to non-state entities.

The History Center has been identified for use by state agencies as an alternate work site in the event of an emergency, and we provide secure, environmentally controlled space for the care of the state's collection of Civil War flags. We adopted the Vermont Women's History Project, relieving the Vermont Commission for Women of the expenses associated with running this program.

We also are a catalyst for economic growth in the communities where we are located. Our investment in the History Center in Barre sparked more than a decade of downtown economic growth, and positions us as a cultural anchor within a community that was recently identified as a "Hot Bed of America's Arts and Culture."

As a companion to the Vermont State House, the Vermont History Museum is an essential attraction in Montpelier, drawing over 11,000 visitors each year, including thousands of heritage tourists and over 5,000 school children on field trips.

Through our work with local historical societies and museums throughout Vermont we also are serving as a force for positive change in communities statewide. As a partner with nearly 200 community heritage organizations we provide support, coordination and recognition for these groups, allowing them to be of greater service to their communities.

In these ways we have endeavored to provide direct assistance to the State of Vermont, with considerable savings to the state and we continue to seek mutually beneficial opportunities.

As you review our appropriation, it is important to remember that \$210,000 is returned to the state for the space we use for the Vermont History Museum next door, and that we annually contribute over \$120,000 to the state pension fund.

We entered this fiscal year with a plan that we believed would resolve an ongoing structural deficit for our organization. To get to this point we have carved our operational expenses to the bone and made many difficult decisions about our programs. We have been diligent in seeking every available source of private and public funding and have been frugal in the use of each dollar. A reduction in our appropriation will inevitably diminish our ability to deliver programs and services to Vermonters, and to the State of Vermont itself. Our responsibility as stewards of the state's historical collections is ongoing and immutable. Therefore we can only look to layoffs and the elimination of programs. The range of options extends from reducing or eliminating our services to local historical societies, abandoning our outreach to schools and homeschool families, suspending our exhibition schedule, or, regrettably closing the Vermont History Museum.

We thank you for your past support of our organization and thank you for hearing our concerns today.