

Senate Appropriations Budget Hearing Testimony  
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Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission  
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Good morning Chairman Browne, Chairman Hughes, and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the budget for the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission.

Pennsylvania possesses some of the nation's richest heritage. As the Keystone State, our history represents a crossroads of people, ideas, traditions and innovation. Our natural resources have placed us at the center of national narratives from the Industrial Revolution to the conservation movement. This history is reflected in the many artifacts and documents PHMC holds and in the built environment all around us.

History, however, is not relegated to the past. It echoes today and informs the plans we make for the Pennsylvania of tomorrow.

Our State Archives holds records that protect the history, civil rights, property and health of Pennsylvania's citizens. Our museums and historic sites tell important Pennsylvania stories using the power of place and historic objects and speak to the shared history of all Pennsylvanians. Our State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) helps Pennsylvanians identify, preserve and reuse historic properties across the commonwealth, enriching their communities.

History is not only a way to understand who we are and why things are the way they are but also a fundamental tool for teaching critical thinking and fostering an informed citizenry. It has the ability to spark curiosity, to inspire, and to delight. Across all bureaus, PHMC is engaged in education and outreach, whether with casual visitors or with professionals.

Pennsylvanians cherish their history and their communities. Seventy-two percent of current Pennsylvania residents were born in the commonwealth. In a recent survey, when nearly 3,200 Pennsylvanians were asked what resource in their community they valued most, the number one answer was "older and historic places." Nearly every respondent surveyed said that they felt that older and historic places added value to their communities by teaching us about the past, enhancing regional identity, and contributing to beauty and the quality of life.

As the state's official history agency, PHMC engages with Pennsylvanians directly in a number of ways. We perform vital government functions, welcome visitors in person, train professionals, and provide virtual access to collections.

Our State Archives works with governmental entities and communities to help train professionals in the care of archival records, retention schedules, disaster planning and recovery, and more. In SFY 2020-21, they provided training to more than 6,100 state and local officials.

The State Records Center assists agencies with retaining records in accordance with retention schedules, and they assist agencies in accessing that information. Last year they processed more than 9,100 agency requests.

The State Archives is charged with protecting permanently valuable records of the commonwealth. We have been steadily digitizing these records so that they can be readily accessible across Pennsylvania and beyond. To date, we have digitized more than 21.4 million records. Last fiscal year, nearly 4.5 million visitors accessed these records.

Our sites and museums offer Pennsylvanians opportunities to engage with their history. Prepandemic, PHMC saw close to 600,000 visitors. During the pandemic, passive use of the commonwealth's historic sites skyrocketed as Pennsylvanians could visit safely, exploring their heritage and enjoying the outdoors. We are seeing visitors return, especially with an eagerness to participate in events and special programs. We want to continue to expand recreational and passive use at our sites and to increase environmental education and stewardship programs.

PHMC provides Pennsylvanians with tools to identify historic resources and to determine how they can enhance their communities of today and tomorrow. The State Historic Preservation Office manages the National Register of Historic Places using PA-SHARE, its new GIS-based data management system. This system is also used to manage environmental reviews. SHPO reviewed more than 6,500 submissions last year. That number is expected to at least double in the coming years with the funding that will flow through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the commonwealth's broadband initiative.

PHMC is committed to investing financially in communities to help them preserve their history in ways that they find meaningful. Some of those initiatives are highlighted below:

- **Keystone Historic Preservation Grants (Planning and Construction):** PHMC distributed \$2.3 million in Keystone Historic Preservation Grants across the commonwealth. Projects included transforming a disused church into the Wilksburg Engagement Center, preserving the beloved Luzerne County Courthouse deer statue, and developing a cultural resource management plan for Presque Isle Light Station. PHMC and DCED awarded \$5 million of state tax credits to preservation projects estimated to leverage \$215 million across 27 construction projects.
- **State Historic Preservation Tax Credit:** SHPO, with DCED, administers the \$5 million State Historic Preservation Tax Credit. Last year, state funds were invested in 27 projects across 11 counties, including the Berks County Trust Co. Building in Reading, the Hotel Altamont in Hazelton, the Sears-Roebuck Building in Altoona, and the Hazelwood Brewing Co. in Pittsburgh.
- **Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit:** SHPO also administers the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit program on behalf of the National Park Service. This program saw the investment of nearly \$474 million in terms of Qualified Rehabilitation Expenditures. These projects help revitalize downtowns and communities across the commonwealth.
- **Historic and Archival Records Care Grants:** The State Archives provided grant funding to assist communities in preserving their collections. Last year we distributed nearly \$200,000 of Keystone funding across 31 Pennsylvania institutions. Projects included inventorying and assessing Philadelphia-area jazz musicians' personal collections, digitizing architectural drawings of Girard College, preserving records of the West Shore Historical Society, and processing mining records from the Punxsutawney area.
- **Cultural and Historical Support Grants:** PHMC's support for cultural institutions extends beyond its own sites. Last year we distributed \$2 million in Cultural and Historical Support

Grants to 154 museums and county historical societies across 56 counties. These funds were critical in sustaining these institutions during the pandemic and in their eventual recovery.

In addition, PHMC infuses more than \$8 million annually into local economies by contracting with consultants, construction companies, landscaping businesses, and others to maintain its historic sites. Often these firms are small, locally-owned-and-operated businesses. This investment, in addition to preserving our sites, has played a critical role helping local businesses survive recent economic challenges.

PHMC's proposed total budget of \$22.979 million will allow the agency to continue to anchor Pennsylvania's heritage. The proposed budget is cost-to-carry, with the only newly introduced funding being associated with the new State Archives, a critical resource for all Pennsylvanians.

Some of the agency's key activities in 2022–23 will include:

- Moving the State Archives to the new building at 6th and Hamilton streets in Harrisburg
- Developing a new Digital Archives and Digital Records Center in cooperation with the Office of Administration
- Expanding the inventory of historic sites to better understand underrepresented geographic regions, themes and communities
- Preparing for the impact of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act on SHPO's workload
- Continuing to build back to normal operations at our museums and sites
- Continuing our efforts to digitize all PHMC collections and make them accessible
- Planning for the complete renovation of the State Museum
- Increasing the agency's sustainability through revenue generation and partnerships

PHMC appreciates the support of the legislature as we undertake this important work.

The dedicated funding available through the Keystone Fund is critical to the preservation of PHMC's historic sites to communities across the commonwealth who use this funding to preserve and adapt their historic resources. These investments help keep communities vibrant because cultural resources across the commonwealth drive tourism and are valued by residents; historic buildings, whether preserved or adapted for a new use, build community character; and Keystone-funded construction projects help create jobs and bolster local economies. All these activities improve the quality of life for Pennsylvanians across the state.

PHMC employees work tirelessly to help Pennsylvanians and visitors to the commonwealth engage in Pennsylvania history in ways that speak to them. We look for ways to help create places where Pennsylvanians want to live, work and play. We look forward to working with you over the coming year to make Pennsylvania's history meaningful for all.