

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2026

Bradford Wilson
Archivist of the United States
National Archives and Records Administration
College Park, MD 20740

Dear Mr. Wilson:

We write in strong opposition to the announcement by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) that it intends to close the regional archive facility and co-located Federal Records Center (FRC) at 7358 South Pulaski Road in Chicago.¹ This decision and NARA's lack of transparency surrounding it threatens the irreplaceable collections stored there, staff expertise, and on-site, in-person research access. We urge you to immediately halt the relocation process, provide Congress with necessary information about the agency's plans, and ultimately reverse this decision.

As you know, Congress passed the Federal Records Act in 1950 to ensure responsible and accessible federal records management.² Chicago was one of the first FRC locations in the country; the current location at South Pulaski Road has been the FRC and regional archive facility since the 1970s, and holds more than 140,000 cubic feet of historical records dating from 1800 to the early 2000s.³ NARA's own website highlights the astonishingly valuable collection stored at this facility, which contains the history of the people of the Great Lakes Region. These include records related to Abraham Lincoln, Etta James, Fred Hampton, Chicago and Regional History, African American History, the Civil Rights Movement, Native Americans, Immigration and Naturalization, the U.S. Supreme Court, and much more.⁴

People from across our region and nation visit the facility for many reasons: obtaining census and naturalization records to prove citizenship status, finding information about Great Lakes vessels on which they served, examining genealogy records to identify their ancestors, studying major historical events like the 1894 Pullman Strike and Nuremberg War Crime Trials, and much more.⁵ The work of agencies, museums, scholars, teachers, and the public continues to depend on access to these records, which are vital to our history and NARA's mission.

¹ Drew Friedman, *National Archives to transition out of three federal records centers*, Federal News Network (June 25, 2026), <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/facilities-construction/2026/06/national-archives-to-transition-out-of-three-federal-records-centers/>

² 44 U.S.C. Chapters 21, 29, 31, 33.

³ Elise Fariello, *The National Archives Celebrates 50 Years on South Pulaski Road in Chicago*, Pieces of History (Oct. 4, 2023), <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2023/10/04/the-national-archives-celebrates-50-years-on-south-pulaski-road-in-chicago/>; National Archives, *Historical Research* (last accessed Sept. 1, 2026), <https://www.archives.gov/chicago/archives>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Leigh Giangreco, *Chicago National Archives Closure Will Be Loss For Historians, Researchers, Even Deep-Sea Divers*, Block Club Chicago (July 6, 2026), <https://blockclubchicago.org/2026/07/06/chicago-national-archives-closure-will-be-loss-for-historians-researchers-even-deep-sea-divers/>

Despite the enormous significance of this facility and the records stored therein, NARA abruptly announced it intends to close this facility. The explanation provided by NARA refers to “underutilized space” and aging infrastructure,⁶ and NARA’s COO separately stated the decision was partially driven by a desire to reduce the federal government’s real estate portfolio.⁷ Since this announcement, NARA has failed to provide any details about how and when it intends to relocate the records, how it will ensure the records are not damaged in the relocation process, and how it will ensure research-access continues at the destination facilities.

This hasty, ill-conceived move would have profoundly harmful consequences. It could restrict access to vital records, including for federal agencies that routinely access them to carry out their mission. It would irreversibly damage staff expertise that has been built for decades around this facility and is inseparable from the collections themselves. It could even damage the records themselves, including the expansive microfilm publications stored there. This is why NARA’s decision has been met with justified alarm and opposition from key stakeholders, including the Organization of American Historians, Council of State Archivists, National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, Society of American Archivists, Chicago Area Archivists, Illinois State Historical Society, and many others.⁸

We understand that NARA must periodically review its facilities and operational needs, but this is not a justification for abruptly closing this facility without serious planning and consultation with local stakeholders.⁹ In light of NARA’s failure to provide comprehensive details about this decision and its significant impact on the preservation of our regional and national history, we urge you to immediately halt the relocation process and provide us with answers to the following questions by October 14, 2026:

1. Provide a detailed explanation, with supporting documentation, of the agency’s rationale for closing this facility, including answers to the following:
 - a. How much square footage is “underutilized” at the facility, and why does the agency believe such space will continue to be underutilized in the future?
 - b. Explain how this relocation will save money for the federal government. Provide a detailed financial report detailing anticipated savings when accounting for expected relocation costs.
 - c. Is the primary motivation for this decision the stated goal of the General Services Administration to dispose of federal real estate?
 - d. What archival justifications, if any, has the agency identified for the relocation?

⁶ See National Archives, *Researcher Updates* (last accessed Sept. 1, 2026), <https://www.archives.gov/research/news>

⁷ *Supra*, notes 1, 5.

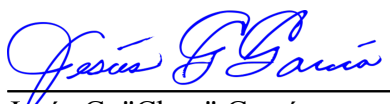
⁸ See, e.g., Organization of American Historians, *OAH Sends Letter of Concern to Acting AOTUS about Announced Regional National Archives Closures* (July 20, 2026), <https://www.oah.org/2026/07/20/oah-sends-letter-of-concern-to-acting-aotus-about-announced-regional-nara-closures/>; Society of American Archivists, *SAA, CoSA, and NAGARA Joint Statement on NARA Location Closures* (July 24, 2026), <https://www2.archivists.org/news/2026/saa-cosa-and-nagara-joint-statement-on-nara-location-closures>; Chicago Area Archivists, *Take Action to Prevent Chicago NARA Closure* (last accessed Sept. 1, 2026), <https://www.chicagoarchivists.org/NARAClosuresAction>; Illinois State Historical Society Facebook Page, *Illinois State Historical Society opposes closure of National Archives at Chicago* (Aug. 10, 2026), <https://www.facebook.com/illinoishistory1818/posts/a-statement-from-the-illinois-state-historical-society-regarding-the-closure-of-122215299782552750/>

⁹ See National Coalition for History, *A Program to Support and Strengthen the National Archives* (May 2024), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/32321-national-coalition-history-working-group-national-archives-program-support-and>

- e. Why does the stated need to close the FRC also require the closure of the co-located research facility?
- f. To what extent did the agency consult with local museums, historians, archivists, and other relevant stakeholders before making the decision?
2. Why has your agency failed to ensure the records remain in the Chicagoland region?
3. What is the timeline for the relocation? Provide a detailed summary of the phases of the relocation process, and anticipated costs of each phase.
4. How does the agency plan to ensure the records are not damaged in the relocation process?
5. What is the agency's research access plan for these records, and how do you intend to carry out your commitment to preserving on-site research access?
6. How will the agency ensure the staff expertise developed at this facility remains despite the relocation?
7. What is the intended use of the South Pulaski Road site after the relocation?
8. Since becoming Archivist, to what extent have you or your team engaged Congress to increase appropriations to the agency?
9. Will you commit to having your team provide us with an in-person briefing about this decision?

This information is the bare minimum that NARA should be providing to Congress if it intends to move forward with this plan. However, the public outcry illustrates how inherently and deeply flawed this decision is, and we urge you to reverse it outright and work with Congress to find solutions to any issues affecting the facility at South Pulaski Road. Anything less would be an abdication of your agency's mission to "preserve, protect, and share the historical records of the United States to promote public inquiry and strengthen democratic participation."¹⁰ Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

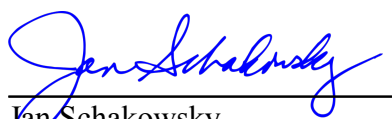


Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

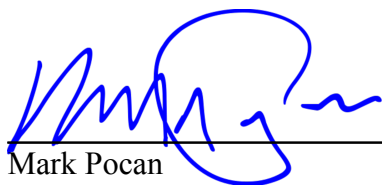


Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

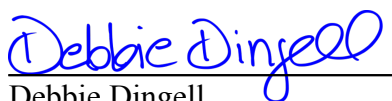
¹⁰ National Archives, *Mission, Vision and Values* (last accessed Sept. 1, 2026), <https://www.archives.gov/about/info/mission>



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



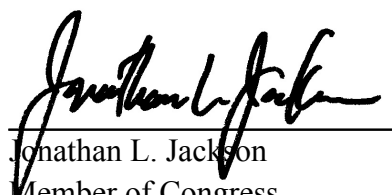
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Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



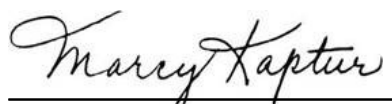
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Jonathan L. Jackson
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Delia C. Ramirez
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Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



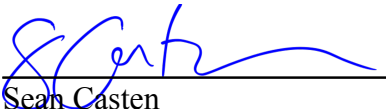
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Shontel M. Brown
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