

**Testimony on SB180
House Appropriations Committee
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Testimony presented by
Arnold Olsen, Director
Montana Historical Society

The State Archives were created by the Legislature in 1969 as a division of the Montana Historical Society. The Historical Society is one of the smallest agencies in state government, yet they are charged with storing, preserving and providing access to the records of ALL state government agencies (MCA 22-3-202). We have been attempting to do this as an unfunded mandate without any assistance from the other agencies and with a minimal staff.

The Historical Society receives an average of 600 linear feet of public records annually (one linear foot is roughly one banker's box). We also have 11,000 feet of unprocessed state records. These are records of government agencies and officials that are stacked in boxes but for which there are no detailed catalog records, effectively making them inaccessible to the public. In fact, about 90% of our state records are virtually inaccessible to the public. The law requires the Montana Historical Society to keep appropriate state records in perpetuity and requires that they be made available to the public.

Laid out side-by-side, these unprocessed state records are over 36 football fields in length. Processing records can result in as much as a 60 percent reduction in materials as non-relevant records and duplications are weeded out by professional archivists.

The Historical Society would use the funds generated by SB180 to hire two full-time, professional archivists who will process the records of state government agencies. Less than one FTE is devoted to state records management currently. SB180 would allow us to increase public access by making the records fully accessible through an online catalog and substantially reduce the amount of space necessary to store them. Even with these two archivists, it will take 18 years to catch up with the backlog. Therefore, this is a conservative request for assistance.

SB180 assesses a fee to each agency of government based on the number of FTE or size of the agency. This approach is better than charging by the linear foot or by the box because it is not a disincentive to preserving our history, and per box charges would have to be excessive in this case. Basing the fee on the number of full-time, regular staff of the various agencies makes sense because larger departments generate more records. It's that simple. For example, Health and Human Services is the largest department by FTE. They also deposit the largest volume of records. Likewise, the smaller agencies like Agriculture or tiny ones like the Arts Council, deposit proportionally smaller volumes of material.

The trend is not 100 percent consistent, which has caused the legislative auditor's office to point out potential concerns over compliance with federal regulations if federal dollars are used, and they recommended a general fund appropriation in House Bill 2. For this reason, SB180 needs to remain viable while the fate of the HB2 funding plays out and is a viable fallback option if HB2 funds don't remain in the bill. Also, SB180 is simply an authorization and does not require that the Society charge agencies a fee.

In summary, with no additional staff, the Montana Historical Society will be unable to accept or provide public access to a large amount of historically significant records of state government, since we are at 98 to 99% of capacity. This bill is essential to state records management and to comply with the law.

I urge your support on SB180.