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SENATE STATE ADMIN.
EXHIBIT NO. 4
DATE 1.17.05
BILL NO. SB 180

January 17, 2005

Senator Carolyn Squires and members of the Senate State Administration Committee

I am here to express my support for Senate Bill 180, the Public Records Access bill. As you know, this bill would allow the Montana State Archives to hire additional archivists to organize the records of permanent public value from Montana state agencies, and to provide assistance to those seeking to use and understand these records.

As the University Archivist for The University of Montana-Missoula, and as a board member of the Montana Historical Records Advisory Council, I recognize and appreciate the importance of preserving the documentary evidence of the state's activities and interests. However, I also understand that it is not enough simply to collect the records of state agencies - to be useful now and in the future the massive bulk of modern administrative records must be evaluated, arranged and cataloged by professional archivists.

The additional resources Senate Bill 180 would make available to the Montana State Archives would allow them to dedicate personnel to the important task of assessing and organizing the state's records of permanent value as they arrive at the Archives. It would also allow the State Archives to address the over 10,000 feet of unprocessed, and therefore largely unavailable, materials already in their facility. Professional archivists are trained to separate the wheat from the chaff, and the additional staff members that would be hired by the State Archives would remove unimportant records that take up premium space while improving the accessibility of the state's records of permanent public value.

Ultimately the goal of all archivists and of all public archives is to provide access to the records in their care. The State Archives holds some of Montana's most important records, records which document and the history of the state, its people, and its activities. The state's records also safeguard the rights and freedoms that we as Montanans enjoy. It would be a tremendous loss to the state and its citizens if the Montana State Archives was no longer able to acquire state government records, or to provide access to these records, because it lacked the staff and the resources to do so.

I urge your support on Senate Bill 180.