



13660 County Home Road • Bowling Green, OH 43402-9563

Phone 419.352.0967 • Fax 419.352.6220 • www.woodcountyhistory.org

May 9, 2017

State Representative Rick Perales
77 S. High St., 13th floor
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: H.B. 139

Dear Representative Perales:

Thank you for sponsoring the House Bill 139 regarding opening confidential records to the public after 100 years. This issue is important to me as the Director of the Wood County Historical Center and Museum.

Located on the site of what was once the county poor farm, the Historical Center has many of the original outbuildings still standing, including the Lunatic Asylum, which was used to house the county's mentally ill from 1886-1900. This building is open to the public and currently contains an award-winning exhibition on the history and treatment of mental illness. The exhibition would not be possible if the Historical Center staff had not been given access to the patient records treated at the site by the county's Probate Court judge.

As historians, the museum staff strives to share knowledge about the past with our visitors while showing compassion for those who lived at the poor farm, including the mentally ill. Access to confidential records such as the court's lunacy record provides a wide variety of research opportunities for historians. Trends can be analyzed, such as diagnoses, ages, gender, and this access even opens up the possibility of determining how these diagnoses may align with today's current standards. Post-partum depression, dementia, autism, PTSD and schizophrenia are just some of the examples that are now part of our vocabulary but were undetermined in the past.

Quality research is best done when historians have access to original records, as it ensures that we can present the most accurate interpretation. Sometimes, when others transcribe documents, valuable information may be left out (like notes in margins) or information is provided out of context. Primary sources not only teach us about the challenges and struggles of the past, but also allow us to make connections with today's attitudes and societal norms. If H.B. 139 passes, it will end the confusion for historians to have access to these types of primary sources throughout the state, whether held in volunteer-run repositories or local government records offices.

Thank you again for sponsoring the bill.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dana Nemeth". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Dana Nemeth
Executive Director

cc: State Representative Theresa Gavarone, District 3