



Testimony in Support of House Bill 139
Before the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
By Fred Previts, Ohio History Connection
November 28, 2018

Chairman Coley, Vice Chairman Ueker, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 139, which would lift access restrictions to closed historical records after 100 years. My name is Fred Previts and I am the State Archivist at the Ohio History Connection. The Ohio History Connection, as the State Archives, is responsible under the Ohio Revised Code for working with government offices to preserve and provide access to records of historical value. This includes reviewing government agencies' records retention schedules to identify historical records and working with them to transfer records of historical value to the State Archives. The State Archives also works with the County Archivists and Records Managers Association (CARMA) to share with local governments best practices for managing and preserving records.

The Ohio History Connection supports House Bill 139 because it will increase access to historical records across the state for genealogists, scholars and other researchers. Records of Ohio's rich history are held in the State Archives, county archives and numerous other repositories across the state. Together, these records help us understand the collective history of our state, shedding light on changes over time in the care of the indigent or the state's response to the needs of veterans, for example. On a more personal level, these records provide information on families' individual histories. Interest in genealogy in Ohio is strong, with the Ohio Genealogical Society being the largest state genealogical society in the nation. Improving

records access directly benefits this large body of researchers, who work diligently for any sliver of information to connect them to Ohio's larger story.

There is precedent on the state and federal level for opening records after an initial period to protect the privacy of the living, when there is a clear historical value. This includes Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services patient records and federal census records. Also, federal military records are opened 62 years after the service member's separation from the military. Opening these additional records after 100 years will add to our understanding of the past and provide more consistent access to Ohio's historical records.

With the passing of time, accessing the information in these records becomes more important to our personal and corporate histories. When we are no longer able to turn to those who created or are mentioned in these documents, we must rely on our state and local archives. Having access to as much information as possible without compromising others' privacy or safety is what allows us to have the most complete concept of ourselves and our state. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.