December 2, 2020

TO: The Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Janet D. Howell
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

SUBJECT: Annual Report on Reducing the Archival Backlog at the Library of Virginia

Gentlemen:

Per item 245 B in the Commonwealth's Appropriation Act for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, I am pleased to submit the enclosed report on the Library's progress to date in reducing its archival backlog. This report covers the period July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020.

If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this report, please feel free to contact me at 692-3739 or mike.strom@lva.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

Michael Strom
Virginia State Archivist, Director of Government Records Services

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education
Daniel S. Timberlake, Director, Department of Planning & Budget
Adam Henken, Budget Analyst, Department of Planning & Budget
Sandra G. Treadway, Librarian of Virginia, Library of Virginia

Library of Virginia

FY 2020 Annual Report on Reducing the Archival Backlog

The 2020 Appropriations Act (item 245B) requires the Librarian of Virginia and the State Archivist to conduct an annual study of the Library's archival preservation needs and priorities and to report annually to the Governor and the co-chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees of the General Assembly on the Library's progress to date in reducing its archival backlog.

Background

The Library of Virginia has served as the official archives for the commonwealth since the Library's founding in 1823. The Library holds the records created by the Governor's Office, the General Assembly, and all agencies of state government since 1776. Our comprehensive archival holdings also contain many of the surviving records of colonial government prior to statehood and the records of many Virginia localities from the earliest days of settlement through the modern era. In addition, the Library holds the papers of Virginia families, businesses, churches, and organizations whose activities document the daily lives of Virginians across four centuries and provide insights into our collective history not found in official records alone. The volume of this rich and heavily used archival collection has increased significantly over time as government has grown in size and complexity, as citizen interest in donating historical material for preservation and research has increased, and as recording practices have become more effective and technology oriented. Today, the Library's archival holdings number in excess of 125,000,000 items, making the Library's collection one of the largest of any state archives in the United States.

The Library's backlog of "unprocessed" archival collections, those collections that are in our possession but unavailable to researchers because archivists have not reviewed the material and prepared inventories to facilitate researcher access, started growing in the latter half of the twentieth century as the volume of incoming material exceeded the capacity of staff to keep

pace. The backlog has increased substantially in the past ten years due to several budget cuts since 2008 and the proliferation of electronic records. In 2008, the Library had thirty staff processing all its archival collections; at the close of FY 2020, fifteen staff members had that responsibility. Nine of the fifteen processing archivists are assigned to the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program and are paid with special funds generated through that program. They can only work on the local court records that are covered by this program and cannot be reassigned to work on other collections. Two archivists work on collections of private papers. That leaves just four archivists working on the backlog of state records, which has increased exponentially with the huge influx of born-digital and electronic records that the Library now receives from each gubernatorial administration.

Governor's Records

The need to catch up on the backlog of governor's records becomes more pressing every year. For the second time in the past two years, the delay in processing those records and making them available to the public resulted in negative media attention for the Library and a blow to staff morale. In 2018, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* detailed the long delay in providing access to the records from the McAuliffe administration. This past July, the Library came under fire for not having processed the records from the Wilder administration. Despite falling just outside the FY 2020 reporting period, I feel it is important to mention this situation here as an indication of the seriousness of the backlog issue. The current backlog of governors' records is 2,929 cubic feet of paper records, 5TB of electronic records, and over 16 million email.

Fortunately, the Library staff pulled together and we anticipate that the records of the Wilder administration, which total 520 cubic feet, will be available to the public by January 1, 2021. This was a truly unique effort, involving thirteen staff members from seven departments within the Library, a dedication of resources that is not possible under normal circumstances. We are also pleased to report that email from Governor Kaine's administration is available to the public on the Library's website and email from Governor Warner's administration is undergoing final review before it will be made available, hopefully in the spring of 2021. The Library is currently in the process of reviewing the email from the McDonnell and McAuliffe administrations.

During the 2019 session, the General Assembly approved $400,000 in one-time funding to help us process the huge backlog of governors' email. This funding will be instrumental in the progress we expect to make on email from the McDonnell and McAuliffe administrations in the coming year. Despite this progress with the email, there remains a very large backlog of governors' records. With this in mind, we submitted another budget ask for the Governor's Office to review. It includes funding for four positions to help increase our processing speed and additional funds to address the processing of the email we will receive from Governor Northam's

administration. If funded, we would be able to hire more archivists to process the backlog of paper and electronic records and begin work on email from the Northam Administration in FY 2023. This would allow us to be ready for the next governor's email by the time that governor leaves office (2026).

The large backlog is not a case of us self-imposing rigid standards that slow down the work. We are required in the Code of Virginia (§ 2.2-126) to process gubernatorial records before we release them to the public and, with just four people dedicated to processing records from state agencies, we simply do not have the capacity to keep pace with the amount of records we receive. In fact, our staff has made the most of the resources at our disposal by working with professors at a university in Canada to develop a system to employ artificial intelligence to help speed the review of email. The Library of Virginia has been a leader in the archival profession in this area. We are proud of our efforts to date, but we need more resources in order to reduce the backlog.

Current Archival Backlog

In 1999, when the General Assembly added 17 staff positions to the Library to address the backlog of unprocessed archival material, the backlog of State, Private, and Local records together stood at 17,186 cubic feet or approximately 25,779,000 manuscript pages. The archives contained no electronic records at that time so the backlog consisted exclusively of paper records. The loss of state funding that supported these positions in the budget reductions between 2008 and 2014 combined with the huge influx of electronic material that has come into the archives from the administrations of Governors Kaine, McDonnell, and McAuliffe has doubled the backlog of unprocessed archival material. We now estimate the backlog of paper records to be 37,219 cubic feet, or approximately 55,828,500 manuscript pages. The backlog of unprocessed electronic files is approximately 8.22 terabytes.

State Records
The State Records collection contains the historically significant records created by the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Virginia government. It is the largest collection in the state archives and provides the official documentary record of Virginia government from 1776 through present. In addition to the records of Virginia's governors, the collection includes the papers of state agencies, boards, commissions, constitutional conventions, the General Assembly, and the Supreme Court. The state archives also contains the surviving records of Virginia's colonial and revolutionary governments that preceded statehood, including the earliest records of the Virginia General Assembly. The current backlog in State Records is 20,327 cubic feet of paper records (30,490,500 manuscript pages), 8.22 terabytes of electronic records and over sixteen million email.

During the twelve-month period between July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020, State Records staff processed a total of 768 cubic feet of State Records in paper format and 108,542 electronic files. During the same period, State Records staff accessioned 279 cubic feet of paper records and 122 gigabytes of electronic records from various state agencies. The backlog decreased this year, but remains at level that will create serious problems for genealogists, historians, journalists, students, and other researchers eager to access historical information and for the general public who are interested in the most recent records of state government. The pandemic affected our ability to process material, but it also hindered our ability to accept new material and we are interested to see if we accession more new records than usual in the coming year.

During FY 2020, State Records staff prioritized records from the Governor's Office, records in need of conservation, and records with the greatest research value. For the most part, the work done on the Wilder Papers fell outside the reporting period, so the paper collections our archivists processed during the past fiscal year are quite varied and include records from Governor Wilder's administration, but also from Governor Kaine's administration, as well as records from the Auditor of Public Accounts, Governor Pollard's executive papers, Unclaimed Property Papers, Department of Education school photos and school integration records. The Library, in conjunction with an artificial intelligence tool, reviewed over 140,000 email from the administration of Governor Tim Kaine, enabling the Library to complete the project. The new email was added to the large body of electronic material already released through the Kaine Email Project (http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/kaine/).

Local Records

The Library's Local Records program oversees a large collection of historically significant records created by Virginia cities and counties from the earliest days of Virginia history. While many historical records remain in courthouses across the state under the custody of local circuit court clerks, about 25,500 cubic feet of local records have been transferred to the Library for preservation and access. Approximately 12,207 cubic feet of these (or approximately 18,310,500 manuscript pages) have yet to be processed. The Local Records collection housed at the Library and in the Archival wing of the State Records Center includes the records of local circuit and county courts, land records, marriage records, tax and fiscal records, wills, and other similar records documenting Virginia history at the grass roots level.

Staff in the Local Records program, whose positions are funded through revenue earned under the Virginia Circuit Court Records Preservation program, focus on processing our Local Records holdings and scanning and indexing local chancery court records for uploading into the Library's heavily used Chancery Records Index database (https://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/). In addition to digitizing and indexing these invaluable records, during the twelve-month period between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020, the Local

Records staff processed a total of 146.5 cubic feet of records. During the same period we received an additional 3.15 cubic feet of local records.

The local records in the Library's collection are a tremendous resource for those doing genealogical research on African Americans who lived in Virginia from the establishment of slavery in the 1600s until its demise in 1865. The potential research value of these records is highlighted by a group of records scanned and available in Virginia Untold (http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/), a database available on the Library's website.

Private Papers

The Library's Private Papers collection encompasses Bible records, business records, cemetery and church records, genealogical notes and charts, organization records, and personal papers. These collections, which range in size from a single sheet of paper to more than 1,000 cubic feet of material, represent about 10 percent of the Library's holdings but are heavily used by genealogists and historians. They often arrive at the library completely unorganized and require careful processing before they can be used effectively by researchers. Our records indicate that there are currently 570 unprocessed Private Papers collections containing approximately 4,685 cubic feet of material (approximately 7,027,500 manuscript pages), plus 426 volumes, 2,400 cassettes, and microfilm, CDs, and flash-drives.

During the twelve-month period between July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020, the two Private Papers staff members processed 78 cubic feet of Private Papers. During the same time period, we accessioned 225 cubic feet of records, which has added to the unprocessed backlog.

The large, unprocessed collections that we received this year that could be of interest to researchers include: Alyson Taylor-White papers, 1990-2018 (editor and author for the Virginia Review); Swift Creek Mill Theatre papers (1965-2019); Dana Hamel papers, 1964-1991 (one of the architects of the Virginia Community College System and of CEBAF [Jefferson Labs] in Newport News); Kenneth Alford World War II research papers (author of books on Nazi treasure and treasure looting); and Augusta and Rockingham County business ledgers, ca. 1800-1965 (business records from Roanoke College documenting a wide range of businesses in the Valley).

Ongoing Challenges

Our ongoing challenges include prioritizing collections in the backlog in order to provide access to the most important records as soon as possible and continuing to seek ways to increase the rate at which we process collections. We have already implemented procedures that utilize artificial intelligence to help speed up the processing of email and various techniques to increase our rate

of processing paper collections. The fact remains that we do not have enough resources to catch up. The longer the delays to opening records for research, the more scrutiny the Library will face and the more pressure the staff will feel. Staff morale is another ongoing challenge.

The next steps to more effectively approach the backlog include developing concrete procedures to process and provide access to electronic records and finding ways to carve out time for newer projects such as archiving state agencies' web presence. Eventually, we would like to eliminate enough of the backlog to feel as though we could be more proactive in soliciting archival records from agencies. Only then will we feel as though we are truly fulfilling our Code-mandated responsibility to be the custodian of agencies' inactive archival records.