June 19, 2008

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
SD-131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Wayne Allard
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
SD-131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Feinstein and Ranking Member Allard,

On behalf of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the
American Library Association (ALA), we write to express strong support for full
funding of $18.380 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities
(NEH) Division of Preservation and Access. With NEH's support, libraries
engage in numerous activities to preserve and provide access to our national and
international cultural heritage. We also urge you to support the overall funding
for NEH at the level of $160 million as recommended by the House
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies.

NEH funding is central to libraries across the country as this funding
supports the preservation of unique collections, the training of librarians to
preserve these culturally valuable resources, and to making important research
tools broadly available for use by the public. For example, NEH funding
supports seven regional field offices and four academic programs in
conservation as well as providing individual awards that support basic
preservation activities in libraries, archives, museums and historical
organizations in 33 states. These include preservation training programs that
reach about 4200 people, of which approximately 40 percent went to first-time
NEH grantees. NEH support of workforce development and training efforts is
critically important as librarians, archivists and museum professionals cope with
the implications of new information technologies while sustaining and building
upon their traditional roles.

Recent examples of NEH grants in each of these areas include:

• cataloging 1,200 newspaper titles and the preservation microfilming
of 800,000 pages of deteriorating newsprint; University of California, Riverside,
CA.

• enhancing descriptive records and rehousing of 1,200 linear feet of records documenting the conception, planning, realization, and operation , from 1935 through 1945, of the 1939 New York World's Fair; New York Public Library, NY.

• digitizing and enhancing cataloging of 11,000 hours of news specials broadcast by national news networks from 1968 to 2003; Vanderbilt University, TN.; and

• providing graduate training for conservators specializing in the preservation of humanities collections including ethnographic and archaeological materials, works on paper, books and photographs; SUNY Research Foundation, College of Buffalo, NY.

The NEH Division of Preservation and Access provides awards to support the creation of a wide range of research tools and reference works such as online encyclopedias, ancient language dictionaries, and catalogs of rare materials. Such support democratizes access to important educational reference works and creates new analytical capabilities allowing for broad participation in research by students and teachers. The Division also supports the use of software tools such as Geographic Information Systems or GIS in educational resource projects. This results in Internet-based spatial and historical reference tools that enable ongoing development and enhanced utility of these educational resources. Such projects and authoritative reference tools build the foundation for research, and in digital form, enable wider and effective access to key resources. Examples of recent awards include:

• compiling the fifth volume of the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE) which documents geographical differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and morphology of American English; University of Wisconsin, WS.

• creating of an interactive Internet-based spatial and historical reference tool for the cartography of the ancient world; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

• completing an electronic database on transatlantic slave voyages and creating a two tiered Web-based resource to service scholars, students and the public; Emory University, GA. and;

• creating the first phase of the online " Encyclopedia of Egyptology" on the history and culture of Egypt from 5500 BC to 641 CE; University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

Finally, the Division of Preservation and Access has provided support to stabilize humanities collections for institutions whose collections and facilities were severely impacted by hurricanes Rita and Katrina. Despite heroic efforts to save materials from water damage, we can expect to see additional requests for assistance by libraries and other institutions due to the extensive flooding in Iowa and elsewhere along the Mississippi. Examples include:

• the Biloxi Public Library was heavily damaged by Hurricane Katrina with collections such as the Murella H. Powell History Collection which contain historic photographs, maps, architectural records, oral histories, family archives and other materials. These were removed and shipped to Chicago for professional cleaning and drying due to mold from the Hurricane.
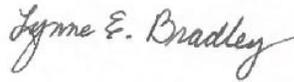
• materials in Tulane University's Newcomb College Center for Research on Women in New Orleans incurred water damage and the conditions in Tulane's building fostered the growth of mold. Materials were moved to professional facilities for repair and/or conservation treatment.

We appreciate the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies' support for NEH's preservation and access activities in the past and request your ongoing support as you and other members of the Subcommittee consider the NEH Fiscal Year 2009 budget request. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Please let us know if there is additional information that we can provide.

Sincerely,

Prudence S. Adler
Associate Executive Director
Association of Research Libraries

Lynne Bradley
Director, Office of
Government Relations
American Library Association