

April 29, 2022

Dear Archivist Ferriero:

We write today as civil society organizations and individuals committed to accountable government, access to information, and the preservation of the records of our shared history to thank you for your service.

For over 12 years, across three administrations, you have advanced and defended a simple, enduring democratic principle: public records are the backbone of open government.

Recent years have reminded every American of how important records are to transparency and accountability, from ethics disclosures to data about COVID-19 to the rapidly expanding volumes of data generated by digital government initiatives and services.

You have not just been a dedicated steward of our records, but one of our union's most important champions of open government. You led not just by word but also by example through events, policies, personnel, and ongoing engagement with civil society.

You guided our nation's record keeper through the first generation of the social media age, reminding elected officials, appointees, and civil servants alike of their obligations to memorialize public business wherever it is conducted, whether instant message, tweet, or text, reminding them to preserve public records where they are created, online or off.

You have shown the wisdom of entrusting a critical institution to a university librarian, with returns for public knowledge for decades yet to come.

While a tremendous amount of modernization remains across agencies and their legacy systems, your service at the National Archives and Records Administration has helped bend the arc of United States history towards digital records and distributed participation with the American people online, from scanning initiatives to transcriptions to public meetings.

Your efforts have helped to connect "We the People" with public records wherever we are across our sprawling union – and the world. You have also helped connect other publics with knowledge necessary for self-governance, including through declassification and transfer of some 47,000 pages of CIA, FBI, DOD, NSC and State Department records to Argentina's Minister of Justice and Human Rights, German Garavano, 97% % of which were unredacted.

Your leadership helped institutionalize a commitment within NARA to work directly with civil society on information security issues, including countering attempts by other agencies or former officials to limit public access to records not properly classified, marked improperly, or that the sitting President did not choose to keep secret.

Your good stewardship of new institutions within NARA has set them on pathways to continued relevance and sustainability, from the Office of Government Information Services to the U.S. Freedom of Information Act Advisory Council to the National Declassification Center, providing bedrock for the next Archivist to build a modernized institution upon.

We thank you especially for ensuring that open government endured in principle and practice within the National Archives under your leadership, enshrined within democratic norms that you quietly exemplified. You've expanded NARA's outreach beyond history and archives groups to everyone who cares about the preservation of and access to the records of government for history and for accountability, from librarians to Wikipedians.

While the list of concerns that US civil society has brought to your roundtables and conferences and inbox has evolved and grown over time, your openness has been a beacon of sunshine in a historic era of thunderstorms over the preservation and disclosure of public records.

The culture that you have fostered, as demonstrated by the commitment of NARA staff to meet with civil society and be responsive in emails will endure as part of your legacy. Your quarterly roundtables and kickoffs at public meetings are a model for transparency and stakeholder engagement across federal agencies.

May your well-deserved retirement afford you more time to walk, practice photography, read great books, and hone your Nocino recipe. We hope that you will stay engaged — you will always have a seat at the table with the advocates for government transparency.

With gratitude,

The Digital Democracy Project
Demand Progress Education Fund
National Security Archive
Government Information Watch
Open The Government
American Library Association
National Coalition for History
Association of Research Libraries
Project on Government Oversight (POGO)
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

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