

## **DORIS/DCAS Merger – List of Concerns and Recommendations for City Council April 13, 2011**

Submitted by: Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, ARMA – Metro New York City Chapter, Historical Districts Council, Jewish Genealogical Society, Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, New York Archives Conference, New York City Borough Historians, New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, and New York Public Radio

### **Summary:**

City Council is currently considering a substantial change in the administrative structure of the New York City Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS). The proposal merges DORIS into the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). DORIS is composed of the Municipal Archives, the City Hall Library, Grant Administration Unit, and the Municipal Records Management Division. The proposed legislation must be brought before the City Council and approved by its members before it can be enacted. As a result, New York's local and regional archives, records management, and genealogy organizations have created this list of concerns and recommendations for the consideration of City Council's Committee on Governmental Operations.

### **Concerns regarding the proposed merger:**

1. Historically, records agencies working as independent units have provided better services than records agencies working as part of larger, less specialized departments. DORIS did not flourish under the Municipal Services Administration previously. When Giuliani came into office, he wanted to put DORIS under the Department of General Services, but he was persuaded that this wasn't useful. As an additional example, the National Archives and Records Administration flourished only after it was made independent from the U.S. General Services Administration.
2. All researchers, academics and the general public need to continue to have unfettered and comprehensive access to DORIS and its resources. DORIS would lose its effectiveness if it were to become a minor part of DCAS and lose its identity and ability to function independently.
3. Archivists and records managers are skilled professionals with advanced degrees, specialized knowledge, and extensive training in the evaluation of records and the retention of materials with historical importance. By merging with a housekeeping agency, their unique skills and knowledge become devalued, when instead, the City should actually be giving them more key decision making positions for records retention across all City agencies.
4. The proposed legislation includes no provisions for DORIS' future and long-term protection.
5. DORIS is currently leading three mayoral agency-wide records projects, which are well underway. What will happen to these projects, which are essential to the development of city-wide records management and archives programs? These projects are as follows:

**A) Development of standardized records retention schedules so that the mayoral agencies manage records appropriately and legally.** Two sections of this retention schedule are complete: human resources and the corrections department.

**B) Standardization of records management software by mayoral agencies.** Currently, agencies working with DORIS are in the process of purchasing software to manage records.

**C) A records storage requirements contract available to all agencies is very close to completion.** The contract specifies requirements for each class of records storage, including: archival records; electronic records; records that require long-term retention; and for records that are inactive and require records storage, but are frequently required for use.

6. Is the merger just about money? DORIS is an agency that once had a small budget but now has a minuscule budget. It must be noted that this budget decrease was the result of political decisions made by the Giuliani and Bloomberg administrations. Currently, DORIS' budget is very small compared to other city agencies (\$1,236,410 for FY10); would this merger actually save the city money?
7. At the March 15th public information meeting, Commissioners Flannelly and Handy spoke of increased resources for DORIS, but neither provided financial figures.
8. In order to provide access to records, DORIS can not be defunded to the point of the municipal archives and library having extremely limited hours or no public hours.
9. One of the functions of DORIS is records maintenance. DORIS' current storage space at Bush Terminal is far from meeting archival industry standards. DCAS may be able to provide alternate storage space, but if they are not willing to underwrite the additional cost of monitored temperature/humidity-controlled storage space with the proper shelving, moving out of Bush Terminal may only address the issue of renting commercial storage space and not the critical environmental needs of the collections.
10. While the proposed folding of DORIS into DCAS will reputedly provide more services to DORIS in terms of space, both literally and digitally, there will be no additional staff hired. Presumably DCAS staff is already working at capacity. So, given additional digital server space, who will maintain, oversee and safeguard the terabytes of storage that DORIS is going to need as its digital collections grow? Is DCAS going to provide the necessary digital asset management system(s) needed for archival document, photo, sound and moving image collections that DORIS needs? Such systems require built-in redundancy, self-policing mechanisms that check for errors, migration plans and disaster recovery systems.
11. If the New York City Charter must be rewritten, it should also be improved. The current proposed legislation demonstrates no improvements.

**Recommendations regarding the proposed merger:**

1. DORIS' future as the City's archives, records management, and library needs to be protected in the legislation. If DORIS is unable to remain a distinct agency, and is merged into DCAS, it would need to be guaranteed autonomy within DCAS.
2. The history of the City of New York belongs to the public; its records oversight should include broad representation. There should be mandates about the membership of the Review/Oversight Board. This Board should be larger, more powerful, and should be composed of representatives from both the professional communities (archivists and records managers) and user communities (genealogists and historians) as well as the general public. The selection list should be compiled by representatives of the relevant organizations. Specific requirements that all members must meet must be developed. This Board needs power to influence decisions made and policies created at DORIS; a Board that only makes recommendations is not enough.
3. In addition to an Oversight Board, a first-rate committee of professional archivists, records managers, and librarians are needed to evaluate the current issues regarding the current city-wide archives and records management programs.
4. The proposed legislation is based upon changing Chapter 72 of the City Charter. However, there are references to archives throughout the City Charter, which need to be reviewed prior to developing more accurate legislation regarding DORIS' future.
5. There needs to be a strategic plan for managing the City's information that is backed and supported by the Mayor. There needs to be guaranteed funding, staffing and authority to implement records management policy. The plan should at the very least address retention schedules, records management training, disposition of records, storage of records, and preservation of/access to archival records. This plan also needs to address electronic records and digital asset management.
6. There are mayoral agencies that maintain records management and archival programs independent of DORIS. If DORIS is to be considered the mayoral agencies' archives and records management agency, it is necessary for DORIS to obtain information regarding the status of records activities within these other mayoral agencies. Additionally, if these other mayoral agencies' archives contain historical information that can be shared with outside researchers, plans should be developed so that DORIS can make those records available to researchers.
7. DORIS needs to be powerful enough to give agency Records Management Officers the authority to implement records management policy.
8. In order to ensure timely access to public records, these records need to be released to DORIS on a prescribed schedule, not when agencies decide to release them (Example: Vital records have not been released for 20+ years. This action does not follow schedules or State law.).
9. Records management should be funded at the City level. This may be unrealistic in the short term given the DORIS budget crisis, but the result of having agencies fund their

own records management without strong City policy to enforce it is that records management often takes a back burner or is the victim of cost-cutting measures.

10. This legislation should be clarified to mandate that the Mayor's records go to DORIS.

11. DORIS' leadership must be improved. The job description for DORIS leadership should constitute the following, based up on the Joint Statement on Selection Criteria for the Archivist of the United States prepared by SAA, NAGARA, and CoSA:

- **Leadership and Advocacy:** Demonstrated ability to provide leadership and advocacy on behalf of DORIS' dual role in preserving cultural heritage and in ensuring that public records serve the purposes of evidence, accountability, and authenticity in protecting the rights of all citizens; demonstrated vision for the future of municipal archives and information management, including development and implementation of information policy and provision for the management of electronic records; proven ability to articulate a compelling defense of informational resources, and the importance of strong, impartial programs for their care and management, to public officials, resource allocators, users, and the general public.
- **Management Requirements:** Proven ability as an administrator capable of managing an extensive and diverse municipal agency with broad responsibilities, including an ability to ensure effective implementation of its mandate, and efficiency and productivity in its operations and use of resources; experience in working effectively with legislators, government officials, and government and private resource allocators in ways that ensure adequate support for programs, even in times of financial stringency; experience in seeking the advice and counsel of constituent and user groups, including professional associations, and in responding to constituent needs; commitment to working creatively with other offices of the municipal government, with state governments, and with other archival programs, to effectively address shared responsibilities and concerns.
- **Professional Knowledge and Values:** Demonstrated commitment to protecting the professional integrity and political non-partisanship of DORIS as a governmental agency in carrying out its essential functions; unquestioned commitment to open and equal access to municipal records by all citizens, in accordance with all municipal regulations and in compliance with privacy protections for individuals; strong commitment to the principles of public ownership of municipal records and to the goal of holding public leaders accountable to the people through documentation and records of their actions.
- **Personal Expertise and Reputation:** Knowledge and understanding of the critical issues confronting DORIS and the archival profession generally, especially the challenges of information technology, and the competing demands of public access to government records, privacy, and ensuring the

authenticity and integrity of all public records; a reputation for excellence, leadership, and effectiveness within the individual's profession, including appropriate scholarly credentials, and sufficient stature to enable the Commissioner to be seen as a leader by a wide range of constituent groups.

12. DORIS' professional staff must meet professional standards and be paid according to that pay scale.
13. DORIS is woefully understaffed. Safeguards against shrinking it further must be implemented.