

We, the undersigned, oppose the proposed legislation, Int. 486-2011, which repeals Chapter 72 of the New York City Charter and transfers the functions of the Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) to the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). We oppose the proposed legislation for four principal reasons.

First, records agencies working as independent units provide better services than records agencies working as part of larger, less specialized departments. This has been proven through DORIS' own history. DORIS did not flourish under the Municipal Services Administration, where it was placed by Mayor Lindsay in 1969. This agency had other priorities, namely, maintaining facilities and providing offices with necessary supplies and equipment; the support and care of the city's records were not priorities for this department. It was not until 1977, through Local Law 49, that DORIS became a stand-alone agency, and its archives and records management divisions began to expand and function more effectively. The law also made participation in the records management program mandatory for all agencies and departments of the City of New York and remains in effect today.

In 1995, under Mayor Giuliani's administration, a proposal was put forth to merge DORIS into the Department of General Services. After many discussions among the local professional communities and the City Council's Oversight Committee, this proposed merger was rejected because the City's administration was unable to identify what kind of cost savings the merger would produce. To merge DORIS into an agency devoted to services such as the management of facilities and real estate is a mistake, and one that has been recognized and rectified on DORIS' behalf before. To merge DORIS into DCAS would be to ignore the very lessons demonstrated through DORIS' earlier history and the history of the City of New York.

The question of whether a records department should be a stand-alone agency or put under a larger umbrella is not unique to the current situation. The National Archives and Records Administration flourished only after it was made independent from the U.S. General Services Administration in 1985. The National Archives began as an independent agency in 1934, but was merged into the General Services Administration, the agency that supports the basic functioning of other federal agencies, in 1949 as a result of the Hoover Commission's report on government reorganization. Until the introduction of the National Archives and Records Administration Act, which secured the National Archives' independence, the National Archives was unable to make its case for the skilled personnel and the resources it needed due to lack of access to the Office of Management and Budget or Congress, and was particularly vulnerable to the political whims of each incoming administration. Congress provided the National Archives with its independence to protect the agency from continued neglect. The Federal Government's support of the National Archives as an independent records agency should be the precedent for records agencies across the country, including our own.

A second key reason for our opposition to the merger is that researchers and the general public need to have continued comprehensive and unfettered access to DORIS and its resources. The records held by the Municipal Archives belong to the City of New York and are a valuable and irreplaceable public resource. Over the past thirty-four years DORIS has processed and provided access to approximately 180,000 cubic feet of City records, as directed by the City Charter. Its staff answers more than 55,000 research requests annually, from New York City residents and employees, as well as researchers around the world. As mentioned previously, once merged with the Municipal Services Administration in 1969, the Municipal Archives was not an effective service provider. While this organizational arrangement remained intact for eight years, the operating budgets for the library, renamed the Municipal Reference and Research Center, and the Municipal Archives and Records Center were reduced and their existence threatened. History has proven that DORIS will not continue to provide the same level access to its resources or of service to the City and the public if merged with DCAS.

A third key reason is that 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. Since the 1970s, the archives profession has developed into a specialized field, with its own graduate degrees and industry-defined standards, much like network administration and other information science professions. DORIS archivists are skilled professionals with

the knowledge and training to appraise, process, describe, preserve and provide access to City records. By merging with a much larger and less specialized agency, their unique skills and knowledge become devalued, when instead, the City should actually be providing them with more key decision-making positions for records retention across all City agencies. DORIS' position as an independent, stand-alone agency has allowed its professionally trained staff to perform their duties without interference from non-professional management. This arrangement is similar to the operational models of other agencies of the local government with professional staff such as the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. The professional archivists, librarians and records managers of DORIS have used their expertise to perform their duties and fulfill their responsibilities to the citizens of New York City despite the limited resources and inadequate staffing DORIS faces as an independent agency. In the past, DORIS has met professional standards and, if allowed, will continue to do so in the future.

It must be noted, however, that DORIS' leadership must be improved in order to maintain a high level of service. The job description for DORIS' leadership should be based on the Joint Statement on Selection Criteria for the Archivist of the United States prepared by the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators and the Council of State Archivists. As established by these criteria, in addition to meeting professional educational requirements, the leader of DORIS must possess the following qualifications: 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.

Finally, the proposed legislation includes no provisions for DORIS' future and no long-term protection. DORIS' future as the City's archives, records management agency, and library needs to be protected. Without the guarantee of autonomy, this merger has the potential to destroy DORIS and the history of New York City along with it. As proven with the example of our National Archives, once subsumed into a larger, less specialized department, the potential for DORIS to be denied an active role in the management of its budget, its personnel, and its records is too great a risk. City records tell the story of the City's history and need to be maintained to document this history for future generations of scholars and residents. As part of our democratic process, citizens must be granted access to these records, and therefore to information about the operation of city government.

In February of 2002, the City Council heard testimony from archivists, historians, legal experts and others who protested the control of former Mayor Giuliani's official papers by a private archives facility. At this hearing, the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York called for full funding of the Municipal Archives as the best solution to the myriad questions raised by the Giuliani records issue. Janet Linde of the Archivists Round Table stated: "with a fully-funded Municipal Archives and a strong set of records laws we would not again find ourselves in a situation in which the public loses custody of and access to its valuable intellectual heritage and the records that ensure an open government." DORIS did not in fact receive increased funding but rather its budget has remained relatively flat, and its staff has been cut dramatically. DORIS had 55 employees in 2001, which represents a reduction of nearly half from 1991, and has approximately 35 employees at present. As a result, the department's ability to serve the City of New York is compromised. This proposed merger has been presented to us as one that would provide DORIS with the resources and the services it is unable to access on its own. However, it has been the City and the Mayor who have reduced DORIS' funding, and who now offer a solution that puts our City's history and our intellectual and cultural heritage at even greater risk. It is an incomplete solution to a problem created by the very shifts in city and mayoral budgetary priorities we are trying to avoid.

The City Administration has argued that if DORIS is merged with DCAS it will have increased access to DCAS' resources, such as access to DCAS' Information Technology, Human Resources, and Legal departments. However, these support services should already be provided to DORIS through other City agencies. If access to support services is the sole benefit to be gained through this merger, it is not

valuable enough to warrant revision to the City Charter and risk of the City's historical assets. There is no assurance that DORIS as part of DCAS would have the staff, funding, or mandate to fulfill its vital role. Sufficient protections need to be guaranteed in writing for provision of DCAS' resources for DORIS in order for this argument to have merit. Furthermore, this sharing of resources could be achieved more efficiently without merging the two agencies, as it requires only the agencies' agreement to pool resources.

DORIS will operate best as an autonomous records agency. DORIS must have its interests and essential functions protected so that the value and accessibility of its records will be a part of the future of this City. The legislation that is currently under consideration is therefore far-reaching in its impact as it determines how our historical and cultural legacy will be documented and how access to these public records will be maintained. These issues are critical to transparency in government and to the continued function of a democratic society. We ask you to ensure the preservation of and access to New York City's records through the maintenance of DORIS as an autonomous records agency, with the financial support and professional respect it deserves.