

Idaho State Historical Society: H416 collections held in public trust

Senate State Affairs Committee
2/21/2018

Chairman Siddoway and committee members:

It is a pleasure to present to you this morning. I am Janet Gallimore, the Executive Director of the Idaho State Historical Society.

The Idaho State Historical Society Board of Trustees has broad authorization and responsibilities under Idaho code 67-4126 to collect, preserve, and promote Idaho's history and serve in a variety of official functions therein. The Agency has gathered the state's history since 1881 and is the steward for State-owned historical resources including over 50,000 objects, 100,000 prehistoric artifacts, 130,000 feet of government records, 30,000 rolls of microfilm, 500,000 photographs, 5,000 films and videos, 3,100 oral histories, 32,000 maps, 25,000 books and periodicals, and 60 historic and contemporary structures. The Idaho State Historical Society is an integral education institution which teaches historical literacy, stewards tangible objects and archival materials, manages essential public records, and fulfills legal requirements of federal historic preservation laws, giving Idaho voice to federal decision making. The Idaho State Historical Society illuminates our state's future and helps people of all ages explore and appreciate Idaho's rich past and learn more about themselves.

We are requesting the Committee's consideration and approval of H416, which amends Idaho code 67-4121. This amendment will clarify regulations regarding disposition of State Historical Society Collections.

Amending code 67-4121 will ensure that ISHS collections, held in trust for the people of the State of Idaho, are not treated as capitalized or financial assets; that the collections in ISHS custody support its mission and public trust responsibilities; and

that the collections are protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for, and preserved.

According to accepted industry professional standards/ code of ethics, including the American Alliance of Museums and Society of American Archivists, disposal of collections through sale, trade or research activities is solely for the advancement of the Agency's mission. Proceeds from the sale of collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the Agency's disciplines, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections, which is defined as enhancing the usefulness, quality, and longevity of collections, therefore ensuring they will continue to benefit the public.

Recent examples of actions contrary to the AAM Code of Ethics include the Detroit Art Museum, whose collections were recently presented as sellable assets in the City of Detroit's bankruptcy jeopardizing the Museum, its sustainability, and the public's cultural assets. In another example, legislation proposed in a nearby state sought to sell collections as a means to generate funding to build a new facility.

The advantage of this proposed legislation is an amendment to existing code that helps clarify the statute. The ISHS relies primarily on the generosity of donors to acquire collections on behalf of Idaho's citizens. Donor trust could be severely impacted if people think that ISHS is acting contrary to best practices. Adhering to ethical and professional standards, demonstrates to Idaho's citizens that the ISHS holds collections for the benefit of present and future generations and encourages public confidence and respect.

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A factsheet that outlines key collections is included in your packets for your reference. Mr. Chairman, I am happy to stand for your questions.