



July 21, 2014

Ms. Margo Anderson
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Room 4W311
Washington, D.C. 20202-5930

Dear Ms. Anderson:

The Organization of American Historians is the largest professional association dedicated to the study, teaching, and presentation of American history. The organization has over 8,000 national and international members including history professors, museum professionals, government employees, archivists, and high school and elementary teachers. We are deeply concerned that the recent Secretary of Education's proposed supplemental priorities and definitions for discretionary grant programs does not include history and civic education. We appreciate this opportunity to comment on these funding priorities and join with other history and civic related organizations that have submitted support letters to include history and civic learning in the priorities. We join the National Coalition for History to support the priorities outlined in its July 17 letter.

We strongly believe that history and civic learning (and particularly American history) needs to be established as a separate priority area for discretionary grant programs. Teaching history, and American history especially, is vital in today's complex, global society. History helps us understand how cultures have developed and how leaders have arrived at various decisions. Understanding history helps our leaders today make better and more informed decisions. Historical study and research helps improve citizenship by giving students the opportunity to develop high level reading skills such as interpretation, analysis, and evaluation as well as critical thinking skills through writing and analytical thinking. An educated electorate is important to maintain a free, democratic society.

In 2001, President Bill Clinton signed into a law HR Bill 4577, which provided \$50 million for programs designed to address the problem of "the troubling historical illiteracy of our next generation of leaders." The next year, the late Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia established

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a “Teaching American History” grant program. Byrd noted in creating this program: “I say today we need good history books and good teachers so that the boys and girls of today will find their heroes in the early Americans who built this country.” Prior to its conclusion in 2011 (shortly after the death of Senator Byrd), this program provided one of the most innovative and extensive programs for teaching American history in the classroom to an entire generation of students. Over 80,000 teachers from both elementary and secondary schools in 3,700 school districts in all 50 states joined more than 2,600 college and university instructors to develop new ways to bring American history to life in the classroom.

As noted in the National Coalition of History’s letter to you, the stipulated end of the TAH Program was never meant to end core support for history and civic education. Under the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, funding for history and civics, along with other subjects, was to be included in the “Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education” grant program. Unfortunately, no action has ever been taken on the bill. We are deeply concerned that eliminating history and civics learning as a core area in the Department of Education's discretionary grant priorities will produce a long-term erosion in Department of Education support for fresh, innovative teaching in American history and civic education. Furthermore, it opens our civic life to an even deeper historical amnesia feeding only increased partisanship in America's civic life and politics.

We urge the Department of Education to establish a separate priority area for history and civic learning, similar to Priority Seven for the STEM subjects and strongly support the six priority areas spelled out in Lee White's statement from the National Coalition of History.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katherine M. Finley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Katherine M. Finley

Executive Director