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*Supporting and promoting
Maine's collecting institutions*

Maine's Nonprofits are Givers

November 18, 2014

By Jessica Skwire Routhier, President, Maine Archives and Museums
and Erin I. Bishop, Ph.D., Director, Maine Archives and Museums

The leadership of [Maine Archives and Museums](#) (MAM), the membership organization dedicated to “supporting and promoting Maine’s collecting institutions,” was distressed to read about Governor Paul LePage’s recent characterization of Maine’s nonprofits as “takers, not givers” who “don’t pay their fair share,” and to learn that he wants to consider ending these organizations’ tax exemptions. The governor expressed these opinions during a [November 6, 2014 interview](#) with WCSH 6, selections of which are available on the channel’s website.

MAM shares the view of the [Maine Association of Nonprofits \(MANP\), which posted a response to the Governor’s statements](#) on their website on November 12. They document the many ways in which nonprofits provide essential services to the people of Maine and carry out much of the work that is undertaken by governments in other contexts, while acting as important drivers for the state’s economy. Additionally, Maine’s nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, many of whom are members of MAM, play a fundamental role in Maine tourism, an industry that many acknowledge as the state’s largest and that the Governor has recognized is important to Maine’s economy.

Our recent [Economic Impact Statement](#) provides the numbers: MAM’s members (which comprise only about a third of the state’s total museums and archives) employ hundreds, serve millions, and generate millions in revenue. MAM’s member institutions spend about \$26 million annually in goods and services in the state. Only about 7.6% of their funding comes from government support of any kind: federal, state, or local. [A study in 2009](#) showed that Maine’s museums alone generated more than \$7.5 million in tax revenue for local and state government and supported some 1,300 jobs in Maine. This data is proof positive that this community gives far more than it takes. Moreover, a significant number of non-profit museums, historical societies and archival collections in Maine are run exclusively by volunteers who freely give approximately 327,000 hours of their time annually to collect and preserve artifacts, documents and historic structures—in short, Maine’s cultural heritage—for the betterment of Maine’s communities and for future generations.

Over the past four years, our industry has had a cordial and respectful relationship with Governor LePage. He worked with the Maine State Museum to put the Maine Labor Mural back on public view, he appointed an esteemed Maine scholar to the state museum commission, and he has supported the continued restoration of the Blaine House, one of Maine’s landmark historic properties. It is our hope that his second term in office will be characterized by the same regard for the organizations that share responsibility for preserving and promoting the arts, history, and culture of Maine, while bringing millions of visitors and millions of dollars to our state each year.

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Maine's Nonprofits are Givers, page two

To nurture a culture of appreciation and collaboration between our industry and the Office of the Governor, we would like to invite Governor LePage to select a date on his calendar in 2015 dedicated to visiting Maine's collecting institutions. We will work with the Governor's staff to develop an itinerary of organizations that show the depth, breadth, and importance of Maine's historical and artistic collections, as well as the deep commitment to public service that is shared by all our members.

MAM and its member organizations look forward to working with state government in planning for the state's bicentennial in 2020, and to sharing with the people of Maine the artifacts and documents that tell the stories behind 200 years of statehood. To create something meaningful and memorable together will require mutual respect and support, rather than divisive generalities, and we hope that we can depend upon the Governor for both over the next four years.

Maine Archives and Museums is the state's only membership organization dedicated to supporting and promoting Maine's collecting institutions. To find out more, visit mainemuseums.org.