



**Public Hearing on Governor's Budget  
Joint Committees on Appropriations and Taxation  
February 19, 2015, 1:00pm  
Statehouse Room 228**

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*Supporting and promoting  
Maine's collecting institutions*

***Testimony on behalf of the Association of Maine Archives & Museums***

My name is Erin Bishop and I am the Director of the Association of Maine Archives & Museums, the membership organization dedicated to supporting and promoting Maine's museums, historical societies, heritage sites and other stewards of our cultural heritage.

The Association of Maine Archives and Museum believes the proposal to end property tax exemptions for some non-profits threatens the continued preservation of Maine's historic structures and our members' stewardship over the wealth of historical collections held in the public trust. The Governor's proposal would significantly hamper the serious work our members do on behalf of Maine residents.

The majority of our 300 members (representing about one third of collecting institutions throughout Maine) operate on annual budgets of less than \$25,000. Yet, their property holdings include significant and irreplaceable historic structures such as lighthouses, sea captain's homes, forts, one-room school houses, nineteenth-century mills, heritage sites and historic farmsteads which would put them over and above the \$500,000 threshold outlined in Governor LePage's budget. Many of Maine's museums and historical societies only exist in order to preserve and make publicly accessible the historic building or buildings that they occupy. If they are then taxed on those buildings, their limited budget dollars will be stretched beyond their capacity to care for them. Many of Maine's landmark buildings will fall into disrepair, be abandoned and torn down, or be sold to private ownership. They will no longer be a resource for the people of Maine, nor a destination for our many visitors.


But this is not just about saving old buildings. The Governor's proposal hinges on a strong and vibrant tourism sector which promotes continued and even increased visitors to Maine who will spend more money and generate even greater tax revenue. Maine's cultural heritage organizations are economic drivers in Maine's tourism industry. Nationally, and in Maine, cultural heritage tourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry. Overnight and day trip visitors to cultural organizations including museums and historic sites, spend 36% more money and stay 53% longer than any other type of traveler.<sup>1</sup> The numbers are significant: In 2009 Maine's Museums generated \$148 million, garnering \$7.5 million in tax revenue for the state.<sup>2</sup>

The Association of Maine Archives and Museums' 2013 economic impact survey finds that our members are economic engines within their own communities. Our 300 members spend about \$26 million annually on goods and services. They serve some 2.7 million visitors each year and 154,000 school children.<sup>3</sup> Most do

so without government funding of any kind. Many rely completely on volunteers and donations. If, in addition to their existing expenses, these collecting institutions also have to pay tax on their properties, they will be forced to cut services, lay off staff and limit operating hours. This means fewer opening hours to engage Maine's tourists and fewer events to encourage those tourists to linger.

To conclude, Maine's non-profit collecting institutions perform a public service. They've entered into a covenant of sorts with the people of Maine to collect, preserve and protect our collective past for future generations. In short, these organizations serve as stewards to the rich cultural history of Maine. If these institutions fold because they cannot pay their tax bill, their collections of landmark structures, historical artifacts, documents, and art related to Maine will also be dispersed and lost to the public. The Association of Maine Archives and Museums believes the proposal to remove property tax exemptions for these organizations places our history in peril, as well as our future as a cultural tourism destination and continued work horse in Maine's economy.

Thank you for your time and attention. I'm happy to answer any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin I. Bishop". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Erin" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Bishop".

Erin I. Bishop, PhD, Director  
Maine Archives & Museums

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<sup>1</sup> *American Alliance of Museums* (<http://www.aam-us.org/advocacy/resources/economic-impact-statement>)

<sup>2</sup> Chuck Lawton and Lindsay Rowe, "Maine's Museums: An Economic Impact Study," *Maine Arts Commission*, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> *Association of Maine Archives & Museums*

(<http://www.mainemuseums.org/Resources/Documents/Advocacy/MAM%20Advocacy%20Day%20Flier%202014.pdf>)