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NARA Chicago Closure Committee and Call to Action

16 Jul 2026 11:09 AM | [Gretchen Neidhardt](#) (Administrator)

CAA's NARA Chicago Closure Committee has convened and begun work this week under the leadership of Gretchen Neidhardt. The team is networking and attacking the problem from many angles. In the meantime, we wanted to share an updated statement regarding the closing, as well as provide actions that you can take to try to stop this closure.

The Chicago Area Archivists Steering Committee is concerned that the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) plans to close the National Archives at Chicago facility and the co-located Chicago Federal Records Center, along with San Francisco and Seattle facilities. NARA has made no public statement regarding the closures, provided little information about where the documents will go and given no plans for keeping the mostly un-digitized documents available to the public. The stealth nature of NARA's action coupled with the lack of a transparent plan is a cause for alarm.

The National Archives at Chicago houses more than 140,000 cubic feet of irreplaceable permanent records from 85 federal agencies across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The collection documents the entire history of the Great Lakes region and its people—from records of momentous and historically significant events to routine paperwork that some citizens need to access in order to prove citizenship, obtain Medicare, receive other government benefits, and beyond.

A sampling of the records held at the National Archives at Chicago capture moments in history like the murder of Fred Hampton, the Kent State Shooting, Al Capone's tax evasion case and registers of Midwestern men drafted to the Civil War. It also holds indispensable records for Midwestern Tribal communities, providing essential information to Tribes about their land, finances and history. There is no advertised plan for Midwestern historians, lawyers, genealogists, journalists, scientists and citizens to have continued access to these documents.

There is also great risk to the intellectual control of the archive and the loss of the people who care for them. For more than 50 years, a dedicated staff of archival professionals in Chicago have preserved these records and provided Chicagoans and Midwesterners access to their history when they need it most. The archivists and specialists at this facility have spent careers developing deep institutional knowledge—understanding provenance, developing familiarity with object locations, even knowing the materials that have never been catalogued. That expertise cannot be packed into a box along with the documents. When these professionals are displaced, that knowledge is lost.

These are not meaningless stacks of paper to be shipped off and forgotten. They are **OUR** records and contain the history of the people of the Great Lakes Region. The National Archives vision statement claims "The National Archives serves all Americans as a trusted repository of knowledge that inspires civic engagement and encourages the discovery of our nation's stories." This move risks the public's trust in NARA and so it is time for some civic engagement. As a federal entity, NARA is answerable to the American people and the CAA Steering Committee encourages our members, as well as the public to hold them accountable.

TAKE ACTION

It's time to get loud! The current administration is continuing its plan of cultural silencing, including the closure of two regional NARA branches. We're asking our members and their networks to GET LOUD about these closures, especially the NARA Chicago facility. This is only the beginning of this fight, and we need to make sure people know it's happening!

Feel free to use any part of the above statement when communicating with representatives, leadership and your network to explain what is happening.

1. Call, Text and/or Email Your Representatives

Use some of the language above to let them know what's going on and ask them to get involved to stop this closure.

- Find your representative: www.house.gov/representatives
- Find your senators: <https://www.senate.gov/senators>

2. Email NARA Leadership

Tell them you know about the intended closure, how it doesn't align with NARA's stated mission and that you are concerned.

- [Bradford P. Wilson](#), Archivist of the United States (Head and chief administrator)
- [Jay Trainer](#), Chief Operating Officer
- [Chris Naylor](#), Executive for Research Services
- [Corey Cooke](#), Acting Chief of Staff

3. Tell our State Leadership

Let them know they need to intervene now before local records and knowledge are lost.

- Kwame Raoul, Office of the Illinois Attorney General - (312) 814-3000 (Chicago office)
- Alexi Giannoulas, Office of the Secretary of State - 800-252-8980 (toll free in Illinois); 217-785-3000 (outside Illinois)

4. Sign the Chicago Petition

- <https://www.change.org/savechicagoarchives>

We will share more soon, and we thank you for your advocacy.

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