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Chair Erin Murphy & Members, Senate State & Local Govt. and Veterans

Regarding SF1746 Replace MN Historical Society with Department of Administration

March 10, 2023

Dear Chair Murphy and Members,

I ask that Minnesota Historical Society be stricken from the member appointments and nonvoting seats for 161.1419 (Mississippi Parkway Commission) and replaced by the Department of Administration Commissioner.

2017 Chapter 4 Section 54 transferred the powers and employees of the State Historic Preservation Office to the Department of Administration from 501 (c) (3) nonprofit Minnesota Historical Society. The transfer completed on March 1, 2018. The nonprofit Minnesota Historical Society is legally powerless over any aspects of historic properties, places, and registers in the federal and state arenas.

This change would clean up language dating to the 2017 legislative session. Should language not be changed, there will continue to be no State nonpartisan representation on this Commission. Communication from this Commission to the State will rely on a nonprofit whose appointed member is not a nonpartisan State employee and does not have any responsibility to report to the Department of Administration.

In a recent project involving state building assets, MNHS failed to follow state and federal communication, consultation, and directive requirements. After discovering 120+ year old limestone footings at Fort Snelling, MNHS failed to notify the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for discussion and determination of the artifacts' condition and whether any could be removed or if building designs needed to be changed to preserve the features. Further MNHS failed to consult the Office of the State Archaeologist for direction on where and how to store the artifacts.

During a federal Section 106 Process conference with the National Parks Service, SHPO, MNHS and myself, an Authorized Representative involved with the project, Sarah Beimers, nonpartisan SHPO employee stated she was not informed of the artifact discoveries. My pictures were the only source of information for SHPO. After 15 months of improper storage of state assets and no communication for direction of storage per the Department of Administration's Office of the State Archaeologist, MNHS improperly disposed of the historic artifacts. These acts are documented in emails from Kevin Maijala, MNHS employee to myself and emails between Senator Mary Kiffmeyer and MNHS CEO and Director Kent Whitworth and copied to myself.

An ongoing project places several Minnesota historic places in harm's way that SHPO is not directly involved in because it has no representation on the Mississippi River Parkway Commission. The Riverview Corridor transit project is scheduled to stop at Historic Fort Snelling within feet of the same area where the century old architectural artifacts were discovered. Riverview Corridor - a bus rapid transit line - staff have presented before the Commission. The Commission shares several interests in preservation of the historic views and places along the Mississippi.

The Riverview Corridor is in a phase where historic and cultural reviews are being investigated under a federal Section 106 Process requirement. SHPO is the only authority in Minnesota authorized to act on behalf of historic properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Nonprofit MNHS has no authority to judge, direct or otherwise decide Minnesota's building and land asset futures or Historic Register properties. Properties on this list that are within the scope of the Riverview Corridor transit project include Coldwater Spring, Fort Snelling, and the Sibley Historic Site. These sites date to the infancy of the Territory and State and include the oldest manmade structures in Minnesota including the Round Tower at Fort Snelling and the 1836 Sibley House.

Striking Minnesota Historical Society and inserting Department of Administration in SF1746 will eliminate confusion and bring qualified nonpartisan State employees into discussions concerning State assets. Making this change will ensure State nonpartisan staff from the Department of Administration are directly aware of and participate in the preservation and protection of State historic sites, districts and places as required by statute developed in 2017 Chapter 4 Section 54.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Chappell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Chappell