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**VANDERBURGH COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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January 29, 2015

To whom it may concern:

My name is Chris Cooke, and I write to you as President of the Vanderburgh County Historical Society with the backing of our Board of Directors. I am writing to you with respect to the proposed Indiana House Bill 1001 (the state budget bill). Our organization is a dynamic and widely recognized educational organization that is a trusted resource for history. It is highly valued for its historical resources, educational impact, service, advocacy and leadership.

Preservation of historic materials is one of our most important goals. Therefore, we are concerned by a proposed 24% cut in funding to the Indiana State Library (ISL). Among these cuts are the elimination of the Genealogy Department at the ISL and a 10% reduction in ISL staff.

The Genealogy Department at the Indiana State Library has more than 100,000 items devoted to Indiana and almost half (49%) of the reference questions that come to the Indiana State Library are for research from the genealogy collection. This collection is a critical component of our state history and our state identity.

The cuts are likely related to an announcement from October 2014 that the Indiana Commission on Public Records had approved a contract with Ancestry.com. The contract would involve digitizing more than 13 million birth certificates, death certificates, and marriage records. With such records soon available through a private entity, the state presumably saw no need to continue staffing for the data through the state library.

We fully support the digitization of records, which should allow for them to be more accessible to the public at large. However, the records should remain *public* records and the originals stored in archival conditions and curated by professional archivists. These cuts threaten those records, will make it harder for the public at large to view them, and will undermine important professional staff dedicated to caring for their well-being and accessibility to the public.

These records are part of our shared heritage and honor our forebears. We must preserve these records as intended so that future generations can learn from them and can learn to appreciate their history and ancestors.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Chris D. Cooke

Chris D. Cooke
President
Vanderburgh County Historical Society