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EDITORIALS

Improve Ohio's archives

State's attention to keeping records of recent history is woefully inadequate

While considerable attention has been paid to keeping state records open to the public, little focus has been placed on improving the collection of official documents.

State Archivist Jelain Chubb says the Ohio Historical Society's maintenance of earlier historical records is far superior to the cataloging of data from the past two decades. Her office in the Ohio Historical Center will be struggling to examine, sort and preserve the stacks of records from Bob Taft's eight years as governor.

She worries that, unless her department is beefed up, data from the era when state offices became fully computerized could be permanently lost, inhibiting future historical research. The State Archives' library on the third floor of the center is open to the public just 24 hours a week, the least of any state.

The society is pressing the legislature for a major increase in funding for archives. The society's executive director, William K. Laidlaw Jr., says that by any standard, Ohio ranks dead last nation-

ally in state support for the archiving of records.

The society wants its records-management funding to jump from \$250,000 annually to \$850,000. That would enable the State Archives to boost the staff to 13, from 3 1/2. The funding increase would allow the department to acquire the staff and equipment to preserve electronic records that otherwise might be lost, to assist local governments in complying with the state's open-records law and to keep the library's reading room open 44 hours a week.

The archives situation wasn't always so bleak. However, while computerization expanded the amount of records that could be considered for preservation, staffing in the archives office declined sharply, as state money was shifted.

Ohio's funding for archives is puny compared with neighboring states. While \$600,000 sounds like a lot of money, it's a relatively small amount in a proposed biennial budget of \$52.9 billion.

Ohio's rich and diverse history must be preserved for future generations. Part of that is keeping well-managed collections of documents that are accessible to the public.