



April 30, 2021

TO: Chairs Senator Mary Kiffmeyer and Representative Michael Nelson and
Members of the State Government Finance Conference Committee

FROM: Kent Whitworth, Director and CEO
Minnesota Historical Society

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Kent Whitworth'.

RE: State Government Finance Conference Committee Provisions relating to the
Minnesota Historical Society

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the State Government Finance bill, House File 1952.

We appreciate the continued support provided in both bills for the Minnesota Historical Society's operations. Our statewide services -- historic sites and museums, educational services, preserving collections -- serve all Minnesotans. We appreciate the support in the House bill for operating support for increasing costs of staff compensation and health care costs. This funding will help us to continue this service to Minnesota.

We are, however, extremely concerned by several provisions, particularly those in the Senate bill, that would remove operations of state-owned historic sites within the statutorily defined historic sites network from the Minnesota Historical Society and transfer those sites to the State Historic Preservation Office in the Department of Administration. This includes such familiar places as Split Rock Lighthouse, Historic Fort Snelling, Lindbergh House and many others. This provision was not introduced as a separate bill and had little to no discussion in committee or before. We have heard no rationale for this proposal, nor have we heard that our operations of historic sites are an issue. Further, the MN State Historic Preservation Office provides a regulatory function and is not equipped to operate a network of historic sites.

Memo to State Government Finance Conference Committee

April 30, 2021

Page 2

The Minnesota Historical Society has successfully operated this network of historic sites for over 50 years. We have responsibly cared for 150 structures at the historic sites while also welcoming close to a million visitors each year (pre-COVID) at historic sites and museums. Visitors include schoolchildren, families, and tourists seeking to learn more about Minnesota history.

The history shared at historic sites is often complex and sometimes difficult, but we are committed to sharing this history in a fair and thoughtful manner, so that people from all backgrounds can see themselves in this history and learn from the past.

The Minnesota Historical Society is a longtime partner of the State of Minnesota in collecting, preserving and sharing Minnesota's history. Since our founding by the Territorial Legislature in 1849, we have worked closely with the State to preserve and share all of our state's history. We are very willing to discuss questions and concerns that Conference Committee members may have and welcome the opportunity to do so.

Thank you for your continued support for preserving and sharing our state's important history.