



May 14, 2021

Senator Mary Kiffmeyer, Chair
Senate State Government Finance and Policy and Elections Committee

Representative Mike Nelson, Chair
House State Government Finance and Elections Committee

Dear Chair Kiffmeyer and Chair Nelson,

I am writing regarding provisions included in the Senate language of the State Government Finance and Operations omnibus bill, HF1952, that pertain to the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) within the Department of Administration.

Rethos is a non-profit organization with a mission to lead and inspire people to connect to historic places, promoting community vitality. Founded in 1981 as the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, Rethos has a long history of working collaboratively and effectively with both SHPO and the Minnesota Historical Society. While both of these entities are charged with preserving, protecting, interpreting, and making accessible information about historic sites and other cultural heritage resources that are important to all Minnesotans, we object to the provisions that would transfer responsibility for state-owned historic sites from the Minnesota Historical Society to the SHPO.

The SHPO is also charged with administering parts of the National Historic Preservation Act that assign duties and responsibilities to the state of Minnesota and to local municipalities. While all 59 of the SHPOs in US states and territories are responsible for maintaining lists of state-designated historic sites and promoting these sites' preservation, few of the SHPOs in other states are responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of those sites.

In states where SHPOs *do* have these responsibilities, these offices are typically located within agencies that have broad expertise and sufficient staff for facilities maintenance, management and interpretation, and an obvious, public-facing and service-oriented purpose, such as the state parks department. In Minnesota, the entity that has that level of expertise with historic sites is unequivocally the Minnesota Historical Society, which has been serving the public and protecting historic resources since before statehood and has been effectively managing the state historic sites network for over 50 years.

Non-profit organizations fulfill an essential public purpose by acting on behalf and in cooperation with entities of local, state, and federal government. Numerous other relationships – in which a state agency or department contracts with a non-profit organization agency to deliver programs on the public's behalf – exist at all levels of government. The non-profit Minnesota Historical Society has long been this service provider for historic places and we see no valid reason for this contract to be altered in statute or in practice.

We at Rethos value our partnerships with both MN SHPO and MNHS and appreciate the excellence with which both organizations conduct their work. I urge you not to adopt the Senate language regarding the management of historic sites.

Finally, the technical changes included in the bill to address oversights from the recent transfer of MN SHPO the Department of Administration – such as the designation of the Department as the recipient of federal funds under the National Historic Preservation Act. These provisions are prudent and necessary to prevent future confusion about SHPO's statutory authority and responsibilities. Thank you for including these changes in this bill.

Sincerely,

Heidi Swank,
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