

## **Mass Deacidification for the collections of the Library of Congress**

### **FY 2027 Public Witness Testimony**

This testimony respectfully requests **\$2.5 million in FY 2027** funding for the Library of Congress mass deacidification program, a proven preservation effort that protects millions of acidic books and documents in the national collection.

The Library of Congress preserves the documentary record of the United States and serves as the primary research library for Congress. Its collections support legislative research, scholarship, and public understanding of the nation's history. Ensuring the long-term preservation of these materials is essential to maintaining the integrity and accessibility of the national record. Many of these materials support the work of Congress directly, including historical publications and primary source materials used by the Congressional Research Service and congressional staff.

Much of the Library's twentieth-century collection was printed on acidic paper. Over time, the residual acid causes the paper fibers to deteriorate, leaving books brittle and unusable. The process is rapid and can render paper too brittle to handle in as little as 50–70 years depending on the amount of acid and the storage conditions.

The optimal solution is to use a chemical process known as **mass deacidification**. This one-time treatment permanently neutralizes the acid, extending the life of the material by at least three to five times and preserving materials for centuries.

Preserving original source material is increasingly important as artificial intelligence and digital technologies continue to evolve. Digital copies are valuable for access, but the original

documents remain the definitive record of the nation's history. This is especially important for the collections of the Library of Congress, which serve as the documentary foundation for Congress and the federal government.

The Library made a thorough study of the condition of its collections and identified **7.5 million high-value acidic books** in need of treatment. Over a 20-year period from 2000-2020, the Library's mass deacidification program preserved more than **5 million books and 18 million documents** from the Library's Gold Manuscript collection with an annual budget of **\$5.5 million. The program in 2020 alone treated 160,000 books, one million documents, and 800 comic books.**

Following pandemic-related budget cuts, the Library reduced funding and temporarily eliminated its deacidification program to increase funds for digitization and outreach. Although funding was recently restored to **\$1 million per year**, this allows treatment of fewer than **20,000 books per year**, far below the preservation needs of the Library. As a result of the reduced funding, the books preserved by deacidification in the past five years have been less than 100,000 – significantly less than the single year alone of FY2020.

Based on the Library's condition study and their corresponding testimony to Congress, there are still **2.5 million books** in need of treatment of which **250,000** are the highest priority. Increasing the program to **\$2.5 million annually** would allow processing of more than **60,000 books per year**, enabling the Library to address the **highest-priority materials within approximately four years.**

There are no good alternatives for preserving acidic material. The Library has indicated that climate-controlled storage at the newer Fort Meade storage modules can provide benefits similar

to deacidification. Proper climate control is desirable, and conditions at Fort Meade are likely to be an improvement compared to storage on the Hill, but the net benefit from the improved storage conditions will only be a fraction of the benefits achieved by deacidification. Climate-controlled storage slows deterioration, while deacidification **permanently neutralizes the acids that cause paper deterioration**. The benefits of climate-controlled storage require permanent commitment to energy, staffing, and maintenance costs resulting in a much less cost-effective method.

- **Deacidification is permanent, storage conditions are not.** Collections should always be stored in the best possible conditions with lower temperature and humidity, if possible, but this does not solve the problem. At all temperatures, deacidification triples the life of paper. Storage conditions are changeable and determined by policies driven by climate, maintenance, and budget concerns. Deacidification permanently gives collections their maximum useful life under all storage conditions beginning immediately upon treatment.
- **Deacidification allows for optimal storage and access for important materials.** Storage at Fort Meade is best for materials that are less used, meaning significant collections will remain in the main Library buildings on the Hill. The stacks on the Hill are not suitable for controlled low temperature operation, and so deacidification is the only method to extend the life of these collections.

Increasing funding to **\$2.5 million annually** would restore a meaningful level of preservation activity and allow the Library of Congress to protect its most valuable acidic materials **before they become permanently unusable**.

**Suggested Committee Report Language:** For more than twenty years, Congress has funded the mass deacidification program at levels as high as \$7.0M while funding the program at \$5.5M for much of the last decade. The current budget of \$1M per fiscal year supports only a minimal level of preservation activity.

The Committee continues to recognize the mass deacidification program is the most cost-effective and longest-lasting means of preserving acidic documents. At a minimum, Congress calls upon the Library to focus on preserving its 250,000 or more highest-value materials. As a result of the evaluation of the benefits of a deacidification program, the Committee provides \$2,500,000 to continue the program at a minimum rate that can continue the work to treat these critically important books.

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