

Ohio County Archivists and Records Managers Association Statement on Permanent Records

As Ohio governments progress with the digitization of public records, we must consider the long-term impact of sustaining them in electronic format permanently.

Technological advancements continue to significantly improve speed, ease of access and how we create and use public records; however, we are only beginning to understand digital preservation for permanent records. The Ohio County Archivists and Records Managers Association (CARMA) strongly encourages the use of microfilm as a storage medium for the long-term preservation of permanent records.

CARMA consists of records management professionals across Ohio. The organization provides a forum for professional discussion and information sharing in an effort to develop solutions to common problems. As the individuals responsible for the maintenance and preservation of county records, we are aggressively seeking technology enhancements to assist us in fulfilling our obligations. We support digital formats for access and retrieval purposes. However, our opinion is that electronic formats have not stood the test of time to ensure that digitized county records of long-term or permanent retention are safe from corruption and instability. We must continue efforts to produce an eye-readable backup of all records that have been assigned a permanent retention period until these concerns surrounding digital preservation have been addressed.

The issue of maintaining public records in electronic format permanently is a complex issue and Ohio's public records laws and the Ohio Supreme Court's Rules of Superintendence are trying to keep pace with the technological changes. Public Officials are required by law to ensure their records are protected and made readily available for inspection during their designated retention period. The integrity of these records must remain intact to ensure reliability, and because the technology surrounding electronic formats is constantly evolving, we cannot guarantee how we will read the information in the future. Maintaining an eye-readable copy of records that have been assigned permanent retention is the only nationally accepted method to ensure the integrity of our government records will not be jeopardized. Microfilm has proven to be stable and reliable for over 500 years. Public officials are responsible for choosing the medium to store their records. Should they choose to maintain their records in electronic format



permanently, they must ensure the records will remain authentic and accessible during their stated life cycle. Since it has not been proven that electronic records will sustain their integrity over a long period of time, public officials should be cautious about keeping permanent records exclusively in digital format.

CARMA works closely with the Ohio Historical Society's Local Government Records Program and supports their Statement on Maintaining Digitally Imaged Records Permanently. We agree that as the individuals tasked with maintaining government records it is essential to follow the reliable method of producing microfilm as an eye-readable backup medium for all records that have been digitally imaged prior to paper destruction or maintain the paper eye-readable copy. It is our responsibility to ensure the integrity and accessibility of public records.

