



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEBRA FERGUSON, Ph.D.
COMMISSIONER

DEPARTMENT OF
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October 31, 2014

Helen Cullyer, Program Officer
Mellon Foundation
140 E. 62nd Street
New York, NY 10065

Dear Ms. Cullyer:

It is with sincere interest and commitment to the Digital Archives Project that I request and strongly encourage The Andrew Mellon Foundation to provide financial assistance to Dr. King Davis, PhD. and his impressive research team. The Digital Archives Project will utilize the funding to preserve an incredibly important part of American history.

As noted in his proposal, Virginia's opening of the Central Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane in 1870 (renamed to Central State Hospital in 1990) was the first mental hospital in the United States for people of African descent. This project is designed to preserve and convert the unique and historically significant records held by Central State Hospital into a digital format. Dr. King's Digital Archives Project has been resourceful and has already digitized 90-95 % of the more than 800,000 pages of the administration documents. The project now strives to build a digital library model to include patient care documents, apply a web-based model that is accessible to families and scholars, and conduct extensive analysis on existing policies surrounding the preservation, access, privacy, and retention of psychiatric records. Without these efforts, this vital and irreplaceable history offering a rare glimpse into what life was like for African Americans following the Civil War to the post-civil rights era could be lost due to the limited resources.

This project is in alignment with improving behavioral healthcare standards nationwide and the mission of DBHDS. The Digital Archives Project has already been asked to provide assistance in the application of digital technology of mental health records from various other states. Their work is being recognized in Canada, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Germany, and Taiwan. DBHDS is enthusiastic about being able to contribute to the project's original research. The Digital Archives Project will provide state and national recommendations as well as enhanced access to historically significant records. Your valued support will facilitate scholarly research and build upon the understanding of the treatment of mental illness for many years to come. By

supporting this project, you will contribute to the enrichment of services, technological advances, and the development of national policies guiding states on issues of access to psychiatric records. If I can answer any questions or provide additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Debra Ferguson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "D" and a long, sweeping flourish at the end.

Debra Ferguson, Ph.D.
Commissioner, DBHDS