

Steuben County
Department of History and Archives

3 East Pulteney Square
Bath, New York 14810

Historian – Griffin Bates
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607-664-2199

Hello, my name is Griffin Bates and I am writing to you today as Steuben County Historian to provide testimony on how the proposed bill regarding "Part U – Digitize Genealogical Records" in the FY 2026 Executive Budget would impact our members' ability to access genealogical/community/historical records.

The [Steuben] County Historian is responsible for collecting and preserving materials pertaining to the county's history. This includes genealogy, documents, and maps of the county.

Genealogical research is the most important service that I provide for the people in Steuben County and to researchers outside my jurisdiction as well. The proposed amendment to eliminate the requirement for the NYS D.O.H. to maintain indices for submitted birth records and death records would be a detrimental mess to navigate the vast archive of the above-mentioned records, making any access to these records futile; the proposed amendment giving the D.O.H. Commissioner authority to determine "the means and methods by which certain genealogical records may be released to an application" as per the Summary: Part U – Digitize Genealogical Records Bill would undermine the integrity of public access to said records, and for Steuben County residents, would greatly hinder their ability to access important genealogical record; the proposed amendment to increase fees for certificates of births and deaths from \$30 to \$45 would be especially detrimental to the people of Steuben County; the proposed amendment to allow the D.O.H. to impose a \$50 per hour fee, in addition to increasing the priority processing fee from \$15 to \$30, would collectively be an egregious financial restraint on the people of Steuben County.

The issues that I have thus expounded on would greatly disadvantage and undermine the public's ability to access these vital records as they are the strongest sources of information for determining genealogy/heritage. With limited access to said records, through these proposed amendments, there would be a great hinderance to prove familial connection, and thus make genealogical research incomplete. For Steuben County,

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specifically, the proposed increase in fees, above all else, would disadvantage a great number of people in my jurisdiction who may not be able to afford even one payment of fees for a single hour or for acquiring a copy for a birth or death certificate.

This issue is urgent, and your leadership is a necessary component to ensure continued access to New York State vital records that are imperative for our members and the wider community. Your consideration of these matters is very much appreciated, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Griffin P. Bates".

Griffin P. Bates,

Historian,

Steuben County Department of History and Archives