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Nebraska Museums Association collaborating with Senator Aguilar to change Museum Property Act

The Nebraska Museums Association is working with District 35 Senator Aguilar to modernize the Nebraska Museum Property Act, a set of statutes for how Nebraska museums manage their collections. Many museums across the state have items in their collections that were never properly accessioned into the collection at the time of donation or were given to the museum on loan and never reclaimed. Without proper documentation, these pieces must lie in limbo in museums for an extended period, during which museums cannot properly treat, research, exhibit, or rehome them to a more appropriate nonprofit, as the museum does not legally own the item. Under the current Act, the process to find the original donor or lender of an item takes a minimum of 10 years and relies on a singular, outdated method to attempt to find said donor or lender. The Act currently states that after a period of at least seven years in the collection, three written notices must appear in the local newspaper, and only after waiting an additional three years, can any action be taken with the item.

Museums across the state agree that posting a notice in the newspaper is no longer as effective as it was when the original Act was written and are asking for the addition of digital media alongside the posting in the newspaper to be added to the Act. They feel the addition of digital media has a higher probability of finding the appropriate person, and will increase the efficiency of this process, meaning the wait time after publishing notifications can decrease from three years to one year before action can be taken.

“Museums across the nation have undocumented items in their collections. The changes that the Nebraska Museums Association is proposing for the Museum Property Act are intended to help museums across the state to properly care for all items in their possession, not just store them. Nebraska is not alone in requesting assistance to change legislation regarding museum property,” states NMA President Rebecca Matticks.

The Nebraska Museums Association’s membership currently includes eighty museums. The NMA Board is comprised of eighteen museum professionals that fully support the change in legislation.