



**TO:** Cultural Education Committee

**FROM:** Elizabeth R. Berlin *Elizabeth R Berlin*

**SUBJECT:** Public displays and access to New York's four state Constitutions

**DATE:** December 1, 2016

**AUTHORIZATION(S):** *Mary Ellen Ecia*

**SUMMARY**

**Issue for Discussion**

The State Archives preserves in its collections all four of New York State's official constitutions, 1777, 1821, 1846 and the current New York State Constitution which was adopted in 1894. In addition, the Archives preserves an engrossed copy of the United States Constitution, which New York ratified at a convention in Poughkeepsie in 1788. From November 8 to November 27 selections from these constitutions were on public display in a special, short term exhibition called "Path to Statehood."

**Reason(s) for Consideration**

For information.

**Background Information**

Among the over 200 million documents, photographs, maps and drawings in the collections of the State Archives are the "foundation documents" that establish State government, articulate rights and responsibilities of citizens and provide the documentary basis for researching and understanding the evolution of New York's government and New York's role in forming our National government. These documents are not frequently exhibited, but are often the subject of research, scholarship and historical writing. From November 8 to November 27 the State Archives maintained a public exhibit that included the 1777 New York State Constitution, which was adopted in Kingston during the middle of the Revolutionary War; the engrossed copy of New York's 1894 constitution, which includes provisions such as the requirement to maintain the canal system and protect the forest preserves

in the Catskills and the Adirondacks; and the first page of the engrossed United States Constitution, which was adopted at Poughkeepsie in 1788, and was signed by many luminaries of New York's colonial history including George Clinton and Alexander Hamilton. The Archives also displayed the journal of the 1788 convention at which the proposed United States Constitution was debated.

Making iconic materials such as these "foundation documents" accessible as exhibits provides a touchstone for discussion, education and outreach to school age children and adults and helps strengthen civic engagement and participation in the democratic process. Staff will review the exhibit and associated public programs that helped to bring greater public awareness to these "foundation documents" and will discuss future outreach activities that involve documents and other materials preserved in the State Archives.