

## Mary Lou Terrien

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**From:** nathan nietering <nathan.nietering@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 24, 2016 12:17 PM  
**To:** Mary Lou Terrien  
**Subject:** Comments for the hearing on HB 5232, Local Historic Districts Act proposed amendments

To: Local Government House Committee Clerk, Ms. Mary Lou Terrien

Dear Ms. Terrien,

I am unable to be in Lansing today but wish for my comments below to be added to the official record for this hearing.

Regards,

Nathaniel Nietering  
3268 Lakeside Avenue Apt. 3A  
Holland, MI 49424  
313-449-1541

I am writing today to ask you to please reject any version of proposed legislation House Bill 5232 to PA 169 of 1970, the Local Historic Districts Act. I am a new resident in Holland recently moved to the community from Connecticut.

Michigan relies on current state law, PA 169 of 1970, to protect significant historic resources from inappropriate alterations, incompatible new construction and development pressures that often result in demolition. It does so by enabling local governments to safeguard their historic resources by creating local historic districts. The proposed amendments in House Bill 5232 (and Senate Bill 720) would completely undermine the power of the local historic designation process and administration to effectively protect Michigan's heritage. If enacted, this change would be detrimental to the preservation of beautiful homes, storefronts and neighborhoods across the state, eliminate jobs which can be held by young professionals, and increase the fiscal burden placed on municipalities.

You may not be aware, but Michigan has one of the United States' premier university programs in Historic Preservation – at Eastern Michigan University. Young professionals such as myself have opportunities to see and learn as students and interns in historic districts across the state before graduation. I am a Michigan native and graduate of the program. When I graduated in 2010, the Michigan economy was at a breaking point and I had to relocate to the east coast for five years to find employment. I made it my goal to return to Michigan when I could find employment in a historic preservation or museum capacity to preserve and interpret Michigan's fantastic history. I am pleased to have been recently hired at a small museum in west Michigan that believes preservation is a cornerstone of telling our past. If historic preservation is determined not to be a priority through the amendment of this legislation, where does that leave me? How about other graduates of the

Eastern program? Michigan desperately needs young professionals in the workforce, and what better than such people who also have appreciation (and mutual support) for preserving our shared past?

Perhaps most important, the proposed changes add a fiscal burden to municipalities. The proposed changes stipulate that local historic districts be affirmed through a public vote every 10 years. Not only is this inefficient, it would be costly to a local government in terms of staff time and community education efforts. Unjustly, the reverse process--dissolving a local historic district--would not require such petitioning or voting, allowing local legislative bodies to eliminate a district without guidelines or justification and without community input. The proposed changes also take authority away from an educated and non-partisan state historic review board and move it to local municipal units – which could become a highly politicized event where the appearance of “favorites” may easily be played. The state review board is knowledgeable in history, preservation, and rehabilitation. Would you want to have lifeguards on beaches who have not been trained in swimming and lifesaving? By that standard, shouldn't the people who help facilitate responsible preservation across the state certainly be knowledgeable in preservation?

For these reasons and several others, House Bill 5232 and Senate Bill 720, *in any form*, should be resoundingly rejected. These bills would weaken protections for historic resources and threaten the viability of local historic districts in Michigan, and will reduce professional opportunities for myself and my former classmates. Our historic places and neighborhoods are simply too important to allow this to happen.

Thank you.

Nathaniel Nietering