

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS,
CONCERNING H.R. 149, A BILL TO DESIGNATE THE PETER J. MCGUIRE
MEMORIAL AND PETER J. MCGUIRE GRAVESITE LOCATED IN PENNSAUKEN,
NEW JERSEY, AS A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 149, a bill to designate the Peter J. McGuire Memorial and Peter J. McGuire Gravesite located in Pennsauken, New Jersey, as a National Historic Landmark, and for other purposes.

The Department recommends deferring action on H.R. 149. Although H.R. 149 stipulates that the Peter J. McGuire Memorial and the Gravesite would not be considered a unit of the National Park System, we would recommend a study be conducted to determine whether it meets the criteria for national significance, suitability, and feasibility that are applied when considering other potential additions to the system since the bill would authorize the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements to provide educational and interpretive facilities and would authorize the Secretary to provide technical and financial assistance to any entity with which the Secretary has entered into a cooperative agreement.

H.R. 149 would designate the Peter J. McGuire Memorial and Peter J. McGuire Gravesite, located in Pennsauken, New Jersey, as the Peter J. McGuire Memorial National Commemorative Site. The bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with public or private entities for the purposes of providing educational and interpretive facilities and programs regarding the site and would further authorize the Secretary to provide technical and financial assistance to any entity with which the Secretary has entered into a cooperative agreement. The bill does not, however, designate the site as a National Historic Landmark, as stated in the title of the bill as currently written.

Peter J. McGuire was a national leader in the labor movement during the 19th century. He founded the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America and is widely acknowledged as a “father” of Labor Day. Upon his death in 1906, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners commissioned the granite headstone at his gravesite in the Arlington Cemetery in Pennsauken, New Jersey. In 1952, the centennial of his birth, the organizations that he helped found sponsored the design, construction, and dedication of the Peter J. McGuire Memorial, also in Pennsauken.

The Department appreciates the desire of the bill’s sponsor to bring greater recognition to the history of the labor movement and specifically to Peter J. McGuire’s story. However, in addition to our recommendation to conduct a study, designating the Memorial and Gravesite as a National

Commemorative Site could create confusion among the general public about the significance of the title and the site's relationship to the National Park Service – especially if that relationship involved the provision of technical or financial assistance to the site. The title “National Commemorative Site” has been sparingly employed by Congress. There is no definition by law or custom defining a National Commemorative Site.

If the Committee decides to move forward on this bill without a study, the Department would appreciate the opportunity to provide technical amendments to clarify the bill intentions.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS,
CONCERNING H.R. 250, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE
INTERIOR TO ESTABLISH THE JANUARY 8TH NATIONAL MEMORIAL IN
TUCSON, ARIZONA, AS AN AFFILIATED AREA OF THE NATIONAL PARK
SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 250, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to establish the January 8th National Memorial in Tucson, Arizona, as an affiliated area of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

The Department would recommend deferring any action on the portions of H.R. 250 that authorize an Affiliated Area of the National Park Service or any role for the Secretary of the Interior until a study has been completed. The Department does not have a position on the portions of the bill that would authorize the construction of a January 8th National Memorial with private funds on non-Federal land.

H.R. 250 would direct the Secretary of the Interior to establish the January 8th Memorial as an affiliated area of the National Park System and to develop a General Management Plan for the Memorial in consultation with Pima County. The bill would also direct Tucson's January 8th Memorial Foundation to transfer any funding the Foundation has raised to Pima County for the construction of the memorial on Pima County property. Finally, the bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to provide technical assistance and enter into cooperative agreements with Pima County for the purposes of providing financial assistance with the marketing of the Memorial.

The January 8th National Memorial is intended to memorialize the tragic events of January 8th, 2011, when Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords' "Congress on your Corner" event became the site of a mass shooting that resulted in the deaths of six people and the injury of thirteen others, including Congresswoman Giffords. The January 8th Memorial is intended to be a tribute to those who died that day, but also to the local, national, and international response to the tragedy. The Tucson January 8th Memorial Foundation will raise funds for the construction of the memorial by Pima County on County lands.

The Department appreciates the desire of the bill's sponsor to bring greater recognition to the events of January 8, 2011; however, we have no basis for knowing whether the proposed site meets the criteria for inclusion in, or affiliation with, the National Park System, as a study has not been completed for the site. Prior to consideration for inclusion in, or affiliation with, the National Park System in any form, the NPS has historically recommended that Congress

authorize a study of a given area or site to determine if it meets the criteria for national significance, suitability, and feasibility that are applied when considering other potential additions to the system.

We would be happy to work with the sponsor and the Committee on how to incorporate these sites into our study process.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS,
CONCERNING H.R. 3197, A BILL TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE
INTERIOR TO CONVEY TO THE CITY OF EUNICE, LOUISIANA, CERTAIN
FEDERAL LAND IN THE STATE OF LOUISIANA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3197, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to convey to the city of Eunice, Louisiana, certain Federal land in the state of Louisiana, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 3197.

H.R. 3197 would direct the Secretary of the Interior to convey to the city of Eunice, Louisiana, all right, title, and interest to the parcels of land generally depicted as “Proposed Disposal Area” on the map referenced in the legislation and comprised of a National Park Service (NPS) owned annex to a city owned building, the Liberty Theatre. Ownership of the annex would be conveyed to the City and the NPS would relinquish any interest. The boundary of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve would be revised to exclude the annex.

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve (park) was established to preserve significant examples of the rich natural and cultural resources of Louisiana's Mississippi Delta region. The park consists of six physically separate sites. The sites include cultural centers in Lafayette, Thibodaux, and Eunice; the Chalmette Battlefield; Barataria Preserve; and the park's headquarters and visitor center located in New Orleans' French Quarter. The Lafayette, Thibodaux, and Eunice cultural centers preserve and interpret examples of the Acadian culture of the area. The Chalmette Battlefield and National Cemetery commemorate the site of the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. The Barataria Preserve interprets the culture of those who settled the area and the unique ecosystem that sustained them, and preserves a representative example of the Delta's environment, containing natural levee forests, bayous, swamps and marshes.

As the park's mission and management responsibilities have grown in scope and size, the NPS has endeavored to work with local communities and identify opportunities to share resources and responsibilities while serving the mission of the agency. In some instances, arrangements that were useful in the past have outgrown their utility and the related resources could better be directed elsewhere in the park.

Public Law 100-250, signed into law in 1988, established the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center (PACC) in Eunice as a part of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. The Liberty Theatre, a vaudeville and movie and performance venue constructed in 1924, is next door to the PACC. In 1989, the park restored and rehabilitated the theater, constructed an adjoining annex

for public health, safety and accessibility and installed a master HVAC system for the theater, annex and nearby PACC.

The master HVAC system is now antiquated and beyond repair and must be replaced. The park plans to replace the system in the PACC and the city of Eunice plans to install a new HVAC system in the theater. Transferring ownership of the Liberty Theatre annex to the city of Eunice would allow the city greater flexibility and autonomy in determining the appropriate approach to the theatre's HVAC needs while providing significant cost savings to the NPS and clarifying management responsibilities for both parties. This change in ownership is supported locally by city officials.

Chairman Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
CONCERNING H.R. 4009, TO AUTHORIZE THE GEORGETOWN AFRICAN
AMERICAN HISTORIC LANDMARK PROJECT AND TOUR TO ESTABLISH A
COMMEMORATIVE WORK IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND ITS
ENVIRONS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 4009, the Georgetown African American Historic Landmark Project and Tour to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs, and for other purposes.

The Department supports this legislation with amendments.

H.R. 4009 authorizes the Georgetown African American Historic Landmark Project and Tour to establish a commemorative work on Federal land in the District of Columbia and its environs to commemorate the enslaved individuals, whose identities may be known or unknown, who disembarked at Georgetown Waterfront after enduring the Middle Passage. H.R. 4009 requires compliance with the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. Chapter 89) (CWA) and prohibits Federal funds from being used to establish the memorial.

The impetus for the proposed commemorative work rises from a long and shameful chapter in history during which 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped, transported to the Americas on ships, and enslaved for labor in the Americas. Two National Park Service (NPS) studies are currently underway that include efforts to uncover documentation on the arrival, between 1732 and 1761, of seven ships carrying enslaved and traumatized people far from their homeland across the Atlantic to the port of Georgetown to be sold into slavery. One study examining historic African American communities along the C&O Canal in Georgetown includes an investigation of the African American experience on the Georgetown waterfront. A second study focuses on the "African American Experience Before Emancipation – An Historic Context Narrative." Both studies will be finalized and available to the public by Spring 2022.

The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (Commission) reviewed H.R. 4009 during its October 5, 2021, meeting. The Commission's review was conducted in accordance with the CWA, which states that Congress shall solicit the views of the Commission in considering legislation authorizing commemorative works within the District of Columbia and its environs.

During its review, the Commission concluded that, regardless of the outcome of the NPS studies, the bill's broader theme of addressing the suffering and trauma endured by individuals who were enslaved and brought against their will to this country rises to the level of lasting historical significance to the Nation. The Commission agreed that the bill would be improved by a broader perspective that addressed the suffering and trauma that resulted from the trans-Atlantic voyage

and ensuing servitude, rather than an exclusive focus on the smaller, specific group of people who disembarked on the Georgetown waterfront. The Department supports the Commission's conclusions and would be happy to work with the Subcommittee on amendments to accomplish this goal.

Chairman Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
CONCERNING H.R. 4380, A BILL TO DESIGNATE THE EL PASO COMMUNITY
HEALING GARDEN NATIONAL MEMORIAL, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 4380, a bill to designate the El Paso Community Healing Garden National Memorial, and for other purposes.

The Department does not have a position on H.R. 4380, as the memorial would be located at a site that is not under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, and this bill does not provide for any management or funding by the National Park Service. We would, however, ask the Subcommittee to note the consideration described below.

H.R. 4380 would designate the El Paso Community Healing Garden at El Paso County's Ascarate Park as the El Paso Community Healing Garden National Memorial. On August 3, 2019, the El Paso Community suffered a devastating tragedy at the Cielo Vista Walmart when 23 innocent lives were lost in a mass shooting event that was racially motivated. Many more were affected both physically and mentally.

The memorial was constructed in time for the second anniversary of the event and was dedicated on August 3, 2019, to provide a healing space for the community. Construction funding was provided by community donations and the County of El Paso. The site is currently maintained by County Parks and Recreation Department as part of Ascarate Park. The site was established as "a welcoming place for individuals and families to find comfort and an opportunity to embrace their individual healing process."

This legislation explicitly states that this Memorial is not a unit of the National Park System and that designation should not be construed to require Federal funds to be expended for it. However, the use of the title "National" creates a reasonable expectation among the general public that the memorial must have an affiliation with the Federal government. The Department respectfully encourages the Committee to be thoughtful and judicious about conferring the designation of "National" to any site that is not associated with a National or Federal entity.

Chairman Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS,
CONCERNING H.R. 4648, A BILL TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF THE CANE
RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN THE STATE OF LOUISIANA,
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 4648, a bill to modify the boundary of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park in the State of Louisiana, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 4648 with technical amendments.

H.R. 4648 would expand the legislative boundary of the Magnolia Plantation Unit of Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Louisiana by approximately 46.1 acres. The land that would be added to the boundary is part of the historic Magnolia Plantation, which is a National Historic Landmark and is currently owned by the descendants of the original plantation owners. The property includes the main house, seven outbuildings, and several cultural landscape features and archeological sites. At present, the National Park Service owns a smaller portion of Magnolia Plantation, maintaining 18-acres with approximately 20 historic structures.

Cane River Creole National Historical Park was established by Public Law 103-499 in order to “recognize the importance of the Cane River Creole culture as a nationally significance element of the cultural heritage of the United States” and to commemorate the blending of Native American, French, Spanish, and African cultures in the Cane River region that occurred from 1714 to present. Today, Cane River Creole National Historical Park protects two of the most intact Creole cotton plantations in the United States—Oakland Plantation and portions of Magnolia Plantation. Magnolia Plantation was the largest plantation in Natchitoches Parish in the mid-1800s, both in terms of land and in terms of enslaved peoples. It has direct ties to African American history from the late 1700s to 1970s, from the period of enslavement, to the Civil War, Reconstruction, sharecropping and tenant farming of the mid-20th century. The plantation is also a recognized Bicentennial Farm, owned by descendants of the same family for over 200 years.

When Cane River Creole National Historical Park was established in 1994, the Magnolia Plantation core was divided in half: half was acquired by the National Park Service, and the other half remained in private ownership. However, at the time it was noted that important plantation resources existed outside the current 18-acre park boundary. This legislation would allow the National Park Service to acquire and preserve the privately-owned half of the historic plantation core, fulfilling the park’s mission to protect Magnolia Plantation in its entirety. Doing so would allow the National Park Service to tell the complete story of all people, of French and African

descent, free and enslaved, at Magnolia Plantation. Enlargement of the park to include the entire Magnolia Plantation core is welcomed as an opportunity to present this important place as a whole. This change in land administration is supported locally among city, county, and state officials, as well as the landowners and family descendants.

While the Department supports H.R. 4648, we recommend amending the legislation to include a revised legislative map. We would be pleased to provide a legislative map and recommended amendments for these purposes.

Chairman Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS,
CONCERNING H.R. 4706, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE BLACKWELL SCHOOL
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE IN MARFA, TEXAS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior (Department) on H.R. 4706 to establish the Blackwell School National Historic Site in Marfa, Texas, and for other purposes.

H.R. 4706 would establish Blackwell School National Historic Site as a unit of the National Park System when the Secretary of the Interior enters into a written agreement with the Marfa Unified School District for donation or co-management of the site and acquires sufficient lands within the boundaries of the national historic site to constitute a manageable unit. The NPS would be required to develop a management plan for the site no later than 3 years after the date on which funds are first made available for this purpose. The bill also directs the Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with the Blackwell School Alliance (and other partners) for interpretive and educational programming, technical assistance, and rehabilitation for the site.

Through the mid-twentieth century, segregation of school children in Texas was a common practice, although Texas had no official state law mandating this segregation. The Blackwell School was the only public educational institution for Hispanic children in Marfa, Texas, from 1909 to 1965. Marfa retains a rich Hispanic cultural presence, and the Blackwell School remains an important tangible link for the community as well as a historical reminder of our nation's segregated past. The Blackwell School is listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its local historical significance.

The National Park Service (NPS) deeply understands that education is important to a democratic society and recognizes the important contribution to America's story that is represented by places, such as the Blackwell School, where Hispanic students were segregated for their education. The NPS shares similar chapters in our nation's history at other locations, including Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site and Little Rock High Central High School National Historic Site. Education is one of the chapters in America's story that is underrepresented in the National Park System. Establishing a unit of the National Park System could be one way to preserve and interpret the resources and related stories of Blackwell School.

The NPS has not had the opportunity to evaluate the Blackwell School as a potential unit of the National Park System. Amending the bill to provide for a special resource study of the Blackwell School, rather than the establishment of a new unit, would enable the NPS to better understand this story in the national context and work with the public, the local community, and other stakeholders to gather information regarding both the school's history as well as the historic preservation and management needs of the site. We would be happy to provide suggested language for such an amendment. If the Committee decides to move forward on this bill without

a study, the Department would appreciate the opportunity to provide technical amendments to the bill.

Chairman Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
CONCERNING H.R. 3531, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE WOMEN WHO WORKED
ON THE HOME FRONT FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH A COMMEMORATIVE
WORK IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND ITS ENVIRONS, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES.**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 3531, a bill to authorize the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs.

The Department supports the intent of the legislation but suggests an amendment may be helpful to clarify the focus of the commemorative work.

H.R. 3531 would authorize the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation to establish a commemorative work on Federal land in Washington, D.C. and its environs to commemorate the “commitment and service represented by women who worked on the home front during World War II.” The bill requires compliance with the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. Chapter 89) (CWA) and prohibits Federal funds from being used to establish the memorial.

“Women Who Worked on the Home Front” refers to the countless American women who stepped up to support their nation during America’s involvement in World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, the female portion of the U.S. workforce increased from 27 percent to nearly 37 percent. More than 10,000 women worked as code breakers during WWII and over 1,100 female volunteers flew nearly every type of military aircraft as part of the Women Airforce Service Pilots program. Women were trained to fly military aircraft so male pilots could leave for combat duty overseas. Other jobs women filled, often for the first time, included keel welder, telegraph operator, steam hammer operator, radio engineer, electrical engineer, crane operator, flash welder, ship fitter, tinsmith, pipe fitter, surveyor, draftsman, and so much more.

In February 2020, the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (Commission) reviewed an identical version of this legislation that was introduced in the 116th Congress. The CWA established the Commission and requires Congress to solicit its views when considering legislation authorizing commemorative works within the District of Columbia and its environs. During its review, the Commission agreed that the compelling story of American women’s contributions and changing status during World War II is of lasting national significance and that this proposed commemoration would enrich and diversify the portfolio of commemorative works in Washington, DC. The Commission also recommended keeping the focus of the commemorative work on the themes of “commitment” and “service,” rather than on the individuals themselves, in accordance with Section §8903(c) of the CWA.

Chairman Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
FROM
THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
ON
H.R. 4454, THE RECONCILIATION IN PLACE NAMES ACT**

OCTOBER 14, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior’s views on H.R. 4454, the Reconciliation in Place Names Act. H.R. 4454 directs the Department of the Interior (Department) to establish an Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names to advise the Board on Geographic Names on renaming geographic features that currently bear place names that are considered offensive or derogatory.

Background

The Board on Geographic Names (the Board) is the interagency organization of the U.S. Government established to maintain uniform geographic name usage in Federal documents and maps and performs this duty conjointly with the Secretary of the Interior. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) provides the Executive Secretariat services and support staff to the Board and maintains the authoritative Federal database of geographic names. Since its establishment by Executive Order in 1890 and its re-establishment by Public Law 80-242 in 1947, the Board has developed principles, policies, and procedures whereby it considers proposals submitted by any interested party to the Board to name or rename any natural domestic geographic feature. The Board encourages any individual, organization, Federal agency, or local, State, or Tribal government to initiate a proposal to change any place name that may be considered offensive or derogatory to a particular racial or ethnic group, gender, or religious group. The Board considers input from local, State, and Tribal governments and Federal land-management agencies before rendering its decisions.

H.R. 4454

The Department and the Biden-Harris Administration support H.R. 4454 and welcome the establishment of place names that are equitable and just, honor the cultural diversity of the United States, and advance dignity for all people in the United States. The Department and the USGS recognize the existence of many offensive place names on the landscape and their effect on many Americans. The Department and the USGS are reviewing the options available for renaming geographic places, including actions the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to take, to address geographic names that do not reflect our national values. The Board and its Executive Secretariat stand ready to work with the Advisory Committee in achieving its mission to rename offensive geographic features.

Conclusion

The Department, the USGS, and the Board support this legislation as part of the Administration's goal that all Americans feel included and respected through the appropriate use of place-based names. If the Committee decides to move forward on this bill, the Department would like to work with you to provide technical amendments to H.R. 4454.