

STATEMENT OF HERBERT C. FROST, REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR INTERIOR REGIONS 3, 4 & 5, 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. 6201, THE NATIONAL LIBERTY MEMORIAL PRESERVATION ACT, A BILL TO EXTEND THE AUTHORITY FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMEMORATIVE WORK TO HONOR ENSLAVED AND FREE BLACK PERSONS WHO SERVED IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

February 3, 2022

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. 6201, the National Liberty Memorial Preservation Act.

The Department supports this legislation.

H.R. 6201 extends the authority for the establishment of a commemorative work to honor enslaved and free Black persons who served in the American Revolution. The National Liberty Memorial was originally authorized on January 2, 2013 (P.L. 112-239). On September 26, 2014 (P.L. 113-176), the Memorial was authorized to be established in Area I, as defined by the Commemorative Works Act (Act) (P.L. 99-652; 40 U.S.C. Ch. 89). The authority, as provided for in the Commemorative Works Act, was for a seven-year period, which expired on September 26, 2021.

The Department believes that this commemorative subject rises to the level of preeminent and lasting historical significance to the United States. The bravery and dedication demonstrated by both freemen and slaves during the American Revolution are well documented but not well known. Soldiers such as Salem Poor, Primus Hall, and Prince Whipple – George Washington's bodyguard - were commended for their valor and selflessness in the midst of battle. Many more Black soldiers fought in both segregated and integrated units; historians estimate that between 10 and 15 percent of the Continental Army was composed of Black free and enslaved persons. At the end of the war, some enslaved soldiers earned their freedom, but many who had fought in place of their white owners, returned to spend the remainder of their lives in slavery.

These invaluable contributions to America's independence are worthy of widespread recognition and commemoration. The Department notes that since the initial authorization in 2013 the site selection has not yet been completed. We understand that raising considerable funding while working through the site selection, design, and construction process is time consuming and look forward to continued progress. Due to the significance of the commemorative subject, the Department supports this legislation and agrees that an extension of seven additional years would be appropriate.

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