

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands
1328 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Don Young
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands
1328 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 26, 2019

Dear Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, Chairman Haaland, and Ranking Member Young:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, representing millions of individuals and supporters across the country, we express our strong support for H.R. 1179, the bipartisan African-American Burial Grounds Network Act.

If enacted, this important legislation would authorize the National Park Service (NPS) to establish a voluntary, nationwide network of African-American burial grounds. The legislation would also create an NPS program, in coordination with governmental, private, and non-profit partners, to assist communities across our country in identifying, preserving, and restoring these historic and cultural sites. H.R. 1179 is modeled after the two other successful voluntary networks NPS currently manages, "We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement" and "The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program."

Cemeteries are places of tribute and memory, connecting communities with their past. Unfortunately, many African-American burial grounds from both before and after the Civil War are in a state of disarray or inaccessibility. Beginning with slavery and continuing through the Jim Crow era, African-Americans were restricted in where they could bury their dead. Local laws segregated burial grounds by race. These sites were often confined to remote areas or marginal property, and they frequently were not provided the same sort of state or local support or assistance as predominantly white cemeteries. As a result, many jurisdictions are unaware of the existence of these historic sites; even when their location is known, the task of restoring, preserving, and maintaining these burial grounds can be expensive, difficult, and require technical expertise.

Our organizations have witnessed first-hand the need for federal action to protect and preserve these important historic and cultural landmarks. By creating a national network, the African-American Burial Grounds Network Act would help to re-discover the existence of burial grounds ahead of commercial development, helping to avoid disturbances which create distress and heartache in communities. It would also ensure that family members and descendants of those interred are able to visit these sites to honor and remember their ancestors. Preserving and protecting these sacred sites, and the stories they tell, is an integral part of our American heritage.

The African-American Burial Grounds Network Act will help preserve our shared history while also better informing development decisions and community planning. For more information, or if you would like to become a cosponsor, please contact Katherine Stewart (Katherine.Stewart@mail.house.gov) with Rep. Adams, Blair Wriston (Blair.Wriston@mail.house.gov) with Rep. McEachin, or Alex Vargo

(Alex.Vargo@mail.house.gov) with Rep. Budd.

Sincerely,

National/Regional Organizations

African Archaeological Review
Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc.
American Anthropological Association
American Battlefield Trust
American Cultural Resources Association
Archaeological Institute of America
Association for the Study of African American Life and History
Coalition for American Heritage
Coming to the Table LLC
Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology
Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission
National Council on Public History
The National Trust for Historic Preservation
Preservation Action
Society for American Archaeology
Society of Black Archaeologists
Society for Historical Archaeology
United States Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites

Alabama

Alabama Archaeological Society
The Birmingham African American Genealogy Group Inc.
Shadow Lawn Memorial Gardens Maintenance & Perpetual Care Association (Birmingham)

Arkansas

Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Arkansas Chapter
Northwest Arkansas African American Heritage Association
Preserve Arkansas
Preserving African American Cemeteries
Preserving African American Cemeteries Junior Preservation Society

California

California Preservation Foundation
Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO)
Society for California Archaeology

Colorado

Black Genealogy Research Group

Florida

Florida Anthropological Society

Illinois

Illinois Archaeological Survey

Maryland

Preservation Maryland

Michigan

Abre Croche Cultural Resources, LLC

New York

Elmhurst History and Cemeteries Preservation Society

New Jersey

Archaeological Society of New Jersey
Down Jersey Heritage Research, LLC
New Jersey Historic Trust
The North New Jersey History and Genealogy Center, Morristown, NJ

North Carolina

The Charlotte Museum of History
The Charlotte Regional History Consortium
Wake Forest Historical Museum

Ohio

Columbus Landmarks
Ohio Archaeological Council
Ohio State Historic Preservation Office
Preserving Ohio's Cemeteries
Second Baptist Church, Columbus, OH, Heritage Committee
Upper Arlington Historical Society

Oklahoma

The Coltrane Group
Black Genealogy Research Group of Oklahoma

Pennsylvania

Friends of Midland
Pennsylvania Archaeological Council
Pennsylvania Hallowed Ground Project

Texas

Texas Ten Historical Society

Utah

Preservation Utah

Vermont

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

Virginia

African American Historical Society of
Portsmouth
Corhaven Graveyard (Shenandoah), a ministry
of Coracle
Council of Virginia Archaeologists
Cultural Heritage Partners, PLLC
Ebenezer Baptist Church, Virginia Beach
Enrichmond Foundation
Fairfield Foundation
Friends of Buckingham
Resurrecting History, Davis Burke Enterprises
(Hampton)
The Lemon Project: A Journey of Reconciliation,
College of William and Mary
The Preservers of the Daughters of Zion
Cemetery (Charlottesville)