

November 12, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, representing individuals and supporters across the country, we express our strong support for S 2827, a bill to establish within the National Park Service the African-American Burial Grounds Network.

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.

We respectfully urge you to pass S 2827 as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

National/Regional Organizations
American Anthropological Association
American Cultural Resources Association
Archaeological Institute of America
Association for Black Anthropologists

Association for the Study of African American
Life and History
Coalition for American Heritage
Coming to the Table
Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology

National Alliance of Faith and Justice
National Council on Public History
National Parks Conservation Association
The National Trust for Historic Preservation
Preservation Action
Sierra Club
Society for American Archaeology
Society of Black Archaeologists
Society for Historical Archaeology
US/ICOMOS

Alabama

Shadow Lawn Memorial Gardens Maintenance
& Perpetual Care Association, Inc.

California

Save Our Heritage Organisation
Society for California Archaeology

Florida

Florida Public Archaeology Network

Georgia

Georgia African American Historic Preservation
Network

Illinois

Illinois Archaeological Society

Michigan

Arbre Croche Cultural Resources LLC

Maryland

Preservation Maryland

New Jersey

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

New York

Elmhurst History and Cemeteries Preservation
Society, Inc.

North Carolina

The University of North Carolina System

Ohio

Columbus Landmarks Foundation
Green Lawn Cemetery Association of Franklin
County, Ohio
Greatest Stories Never Told, 501(c)3
Heritage Ohio
Ohio Archaeological Council
Ohio History Connection
Upper Arlington Historical Society

Pennsylvania

Friends of Midland
Pennsylvania Hallowed Ground Project
Philadelphia Archaeological Forum

South Carolina

Gullah Society

Vermont

Vermont State Historic Preservation Office/
Division for Historic Preservation

Virginia

African American Historical Society of
Portsmouth
Corhaven Graveyard
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond
Josephine School Community Museum
Preservers of the Daughters of Zion Cemetery
Preservation Piedmont (Charlottesville)
Preservation Virginia
Resurrecting History, Davis Burke Enterprises
Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project
Shenandoah Valley Black Heritage Project
University of Virginia
Virginia Humanities

Washington, D.C.

Mt Zion-Female Union Band Society Historic
Memorial Park Foundation