Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, we appreciate the opportunity to share the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s views regarding the African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Act (S. 3667) and the New Philadelphia National Historical Park Act (S. 3141). My name is Pam Bowman, and I am the Senior Director of Public Lands Policy at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately funded charitable, educational, and nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1949 to “facilitate public participation in historic preservation” and to further the purposes of federal historic preservation laws. The intent of Congress was for the National Trust “to mobilize and coordinate public interest, participation, and resources in the preservation and interpretation of sites and buildings.” With headquarters in Washington, D.C., 28 historic sites, more than one million members and supporters, and a national network of partners in states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Trust works to save America’s historic places and advocates for historic preservation as a fundamental value in programs and policies at all levels of government.

S. 3667, African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Act

We appreciate the leadership of Senators Sherrod Brown and Mitt Romney in the Senate and Representatives Alma Adams, Donald McEachin, and Brian Fitzpatrick in the House (H.R. 6805) on this bipartisan and bicameral legislation to preserve African American burial grounds and provide vital assistance. The National Trust strongly endorses this legislation. The bill, among other things, would authorize the National Park Service, in consultation with the National Trust, to establish a $3 million annual grant program, in coordination and collaboration with governmental, private, and non-profit partners, to aid preservation efforts across the country to research, identify, document, preserve, and interpret historic African American burial grounds. The legislation ensures that descendant-led and preservation organizations working to protect African American burial grounds can receive grant funding to preserve these sacred landscapes.

Cemeteries are solemn places of memory and also provide a connection to the past. Unfortunately, many African American burial grounds have suffered from a state of disrepair or are inaccessible and in need of preservation after years of restrictions on where African Americans could bury their dead. Local laws that segregated burial grounds by race combined with siting in remote areas and limited state and local support for maintenance have left many burial grounds in a state of disarray and others in unknown locations without documentation. These sacred places for tribute and memory are integral to the shared story of our American heritage.

Enactment of this legislation and its competitive grant program will aid localities in acquiring the funding necessary to preserve and document these sites. Assisting with the discovery of these places of tribute and memory ahead of commercial development will help avoid disturbances of the locations and aid family members, descendants, and community members in honoring and remembering their shared past. We urge your support for this bill that would assist descendants of those interred to be able to visit

\[54 \text{ U.S.C. §§ 320101, 312102}\]
these historic places, honor and remember their ancestors, and preserve a vital piece of our nation’s heritage.

**S. 3141, New Philadelphia National Historical Park Act**

We appreciate the leadership of Richard Durbin in the Senate and Representative Darin LaHood in the House (H.R. 820) on this bicameral legislation that would establish the New Philadelphia National Historical Park in Illinois as a unit of the National Park System. The National Trust endorses this legislation and supported early efforts on this project in the 113th Congress, when Senators Richard Durbin and Mark Kirk and Representative Aaron Schock introduced the New Philadelphia, Illinois Study Act (S. 1328, H.R. 930) that was signed into law by President Obama in 2014.

New Philadelphia, located in Pike County, Illinois, was founded in 1836 by Frank McWorter, an enslaved African American man who purchased his own freedom and that of over a dozen family members. New Philadelphia is the first town known to be platted and legally registered by an African American prior to the Civil War and is historically significant, as evidenced by its listing on the National Register of Historic Places and a designation as a National Historic Landmark. The site is also included in the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program and many of the artifacts from this archaeological site are displayed in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

The story of Frank McWorter and New Philadelphia includes the rich history of a racially diverse, rural community whose formerly enslaved and free-born African American and European American residents lived together in a region and era of intense racial unrest and turbulence. The National Park Service noted that New Philadelphia qualified for National Historic Landmark status “for its high potential to yield information of major scientific importance to our understandings of free, multi-racial, rural communities, and for the possibilities the townsite possesses to affect theories, concepts, methods, and ideas in historical archeology to a major degree.” (King, 2009)

Establishing New Philadelphia as a National Historical Park provides an opportunity to share the inspiring stories of this historic town with the public and ensure the site is preserved for continued archaeological study and for future generations to come.

Thank you for considering our views and please don’t hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Pam Bowman
Senior Director of Public Lands Policy
National Trust for Historic Preservation