



NATIONAL COALITION FOR HISTORY

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The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Collins:

The National Coalition for History (NCH) would like to comment on S. 398, the “Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Women’s History Museum Act of 2013.” NCH is a consortium of over 50 organizations that advocates on federal legislative and regulatory issues. The coalition is made up of a diverse number of groups representing historians, archivists, researchers, teachers, students, documentary editors, preservationists, political scientists, museum professionals and other stakeholders.

We appreciate all the work you have put into this effort over many years. NCH strongly supports the bill’s intent of creating a commission to study the issue, as well as the ultimate goal of building a National Women’s History Museum. Nevertheless, we have concerns with the bill in its current form, and would like to offer some constructive amendments to strengthen the legislation.

NCH is very concerned that the bill, as written, does not stipulate that any professional historians be appointed to the eight-member bipartisan commission. Any project to create a new national history museum should involve professional historians with expertise in women’s history from the outset. Interpreting the past is vital to democratic debate and civic life, and scholars experienced in investigating and interpreting the past should be part of that process.

NCH is also concerned with Section 4(b)(2)(A) of the bill, which calls for considering a role for the National Women’s History Museum (501)(c)(3) (NWHM) organization in raising funds for the construction of the Museum. It is unusual for the authorizing legislation for a museum commission to include the name of a specific non-profit in the section dealing with developing the fundraising plan. This was not the case with laws authorizing other new museums on the National Mall, including the National Museum of the American Latino, on which S. 398 is based. To include the NWHM in the language of the bill may be misinterpreted to suggest an endorsement that we feel is inappropriate. The NWHM has been mired in controversies regarding many aspects of its activities, from the quality of its scholarship to its ability to raise funds. While we recognize the hard work the organization has done to bring the project this far, NCH recommends a fresh start if this important endeavor is to proceed towards a successful outcome.

Finally, we are concerned that there is no clear provision in the legislation to require the commission to seek, or provide the opportunity for, public comment. While seeking public input may be implied, it is too important to leave to chance. The commission's report can only be enhanced by involvement from the broad spectrum of citizens with an interest in the Museum.

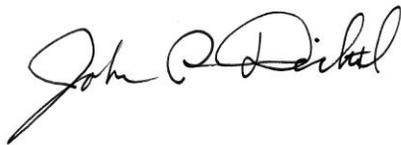
To summarize, the National Coalition for History recommends three amendments which we feel will improve the bill:

1. Section 3(c)(1)(B) describing the qualifications of commission members should be amended to include the language, "professional historians with expertise in women's history."
2. Section 4 (b)(2)(A) of the bill, which calls for considering a role for the National Women's History Museum organization regarding fundraising, should be deleted.
3. Include a mandate that the commission seek public input as part of its deliberations.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments, and we hope we can work with you and your colleagues to improve this important legislation. The National Coalition for History and our member organizations stand ready to assist the commission to ensure that we achieve the ultimate goal of creating a world-class National Women's History Museum.

If you have any questions, please contact Lee White, the Executive Director of the NCH at 202-544-2422, x-116 or lwhite@historycoalition.org.

Sincerely,



John Dichtl
NCH Policy Board President



Lee White
NCH Executive Director