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Testimony for the
U. S. House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Rep. Tom McClintock, Chairman
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H.R. 2817: National Historic Preservation Amendments Act of 2015

Thank you Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas, and members of the House Committee on Natural Resources Federal Lands Subcommittee for this opportunity to provide testimony on H.R. 2817, the National Historic Preservation Amendments Act of 2015. I am the Director of the Maryland Historical Trust and President of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, which represents State Historic Preservation Officers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and eight territories and commonwealths.

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers strongly supports H.R. 2817, which would reauthorize the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) for 10 years. I want to thank Congressmen Turner and Blumenauer for sponsoring the bill and for their unwavering support for historic preservation.

SHPOs operate under a one-of-a kind federal-state partnership in which the National Historic Preservation Act sets the policy, and the states—through the SHPOs—administer much of the program on behalf of the Department of Interior. The Historic Preservation Fund was created to provide the resources to State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices necessary to implement this program, with states providing a minimum match of 40 percent. Annual allocations of funds to states require the development of a state historic preservation plan that we create in consultation with local governments and non-profit partners to ensure that these federal programs are carried out in ways that are most responsive to local needs, local conditions, and local priorities.

SHPOs serve as the critical infrastructure that underpins the national historic preservation program. For the past forty years, programs administered with support from the HPF –the National Register of Historic Places, the Historic Preservation Rehabilitation Tax Credit, and federal project review - have helped local communities in every Congressional district to recognize, save, and protect America’s historic places. Communities use the National Register designations to celebrate and honor the past without limiting use of properties in the future. Communities benefit from tax credit projects that create jobs, recycle vacant and underutilized properties and put them back on state and local property tax rolls. Communities actively engage in federal project reviews to ensure that agencies are a good neighbor and that there is a local voice in federal decision-making.

Notably, the programs funded by the HPF differ greatly from other conservation programs. They are primarily focused on assistance, not acquisition. The federal government does not own,

manage, or maintain responsibility for most of our Nation's historic assets. Instead, the program, through the SHPOs, provides individuals, communities, local and state governments, and federal agencies the tools they need to identify, preserve, maintain, and utilize the historic assets important to them.

The HPF does not use tax-payer dollars, but rather a tiny percentage of federal offshore drilling revenue. This money is then used for finding, protecting, and utilizing historic resources. The HPF has strong support from states that benefit from off-shore drilling, like Louisiana. Officials in these states recognize the benefit of using revenue from oil production, a non-renewable resource, and investing it in historic preservation, a renewable source of revenue for communities.

Authorized at \$150 million for the exclusive use of historic preservation, appropriation levels have never approached that amount. Even with chronic underfunding, since its creation in 1976 through the end of 2014, the HPF has facilitated more than 1.75 million listings on the National Register, the survey of millions of acres for cultural resources, and \$117 billion in private investment through the Historic Tax Credit - which has rehabilitated 40,000 historic buildings and created 2.5 million local jobs.

Although these numbers are significant, they do not reveal the importance of the HPF to our country and more specifically to your constituents. The importance of the HPF can be found in places like the Mariposa Historic District, which tells the story of the California Gold Rush, and the Downtown Lowell Historic District, which tells the story of American industrialization. The HPF provided the funding that state historic preservation offices needed to survey, evaluate and nominate these historic districts.

Historic preservation projects that are facilitated by the HPF are about much more than preserving places and saving buildings. They are about revitalizing cities and towns. These historic preservation projects do something that simply building new homes, office buildings and stores could never do. They tell the stories of our communities. They tell us about where we have come from and they point us toward where we are going.

The economic benefits of historic preservation are extremely important. That said, as Americans, we can all agree that there are places that we should endeavor to preserve regardless of the monetary benefit of their preservation. If we allow the places that tell America's story—that tell our story—to simply disappear, we will be poor in ways that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. On behalf of the National Conference, I want to thank the many members of this subcommittee who are co-sponsors of H.R. 2817 and urge you to approve the bill as quickly as possible.