

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

Thank you for your longstanding support for preserving America's special places, and thank you in particular for providing \$204.5 million in funding for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) in last year's Interior and Environment Appropriations bill. We write to request that you continue this support by appropriating up to \$225 million for the Historic Preservation Fund for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. Of the total, we request that \$70 million support State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), \$34 million support Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs), \$40 million support the Save America's Treasures grant program, \$13 million support competitive grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, \$17 million support Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grants, and \$5 million support a competitive grant program to survey and document historic resources. As part of this request, we also support \$28 million for African American Civil Rights Initiative Competitive Grants and \$7 million for the History of Equal Rights grant program to preserve the sites and stories associated with securing civil rights for All Americans. Finally, we strongly support \$11 million for the Semiquincentennial grant program to preserve historical sites commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the United States of America.

SHPOs lead efforts to promote and preserve our nation's unique historic and cultural heritage. SHPOs carry out the *National Historic Preservation Act*, which provides citizens with the tools they need to revitalize, rehabilitate, and protect the resources our communities value most. In FY21 SHPOs reviewed and consulted on 124,300 Federal undertakings, provided 89,600 National Register eligibility opinions, and surveyed 8.5 million acres for cultural resources. SHPOs also assist in administering the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program that has created nearly \$3 million jobs new jobs and leveraged approximately \$199 billion in private investment since the program's inception.

THPOs carry out many of the same functions for tribal governments. Just as the SHPOs review federal undertakings on state lands, the THPOs review federal undertakings on tribal government lands. There were only 12 THPOs when the program first provided funding in 1996. Today, there are more than 200 THPOs, and the average THPO receives several thousand dollars less than when the program first started. Congress and the United States have a responsibility to sustain these services as part of our government-to-government relationship with the tribes, and while funding for THPOs as a category has grown in past years, we must ensure those increases are felt at the level of individual Tribal Historic Preservation Offices as well.

HPF's competitive grant programs preserve, document, and exhibit diverse histories. These programs address a wide variety of preservation needs across the country and fund various types of work. In 2019, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department was awarded a \$665,000 Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant to implement a grant program for the preservation of historic theaters. Eight theaters received between \$80,000-\$90,000 to repair and preserve their venues. Alaska Arts Southeast received a \$351,000 Save America's Treasures grant in 2021 to rehabilitate the Whitmore Hall at the former Sheldon Jackson

School. The school now serves as the Sitka Fine Arts Camp which is restoring the physical campus and repurposing it with arts and cultural education programs.

Funding for these historic preservation programs is vital for ensuring the resources necessary to tell the complete story of America. Infrastructure investments funded by the bipartisan infrastructure law are also expected to greatly add to the workload of SHPOs and THPOs, so we must ensure these offices are appropriately equipped. This year, the program authorization of the Historic Preservation Fund is set to expire, and it is imperative the program get reauthorized to address the ongoing funding needs. Historic preservation is an investment in towns and cities throughout the country that benefit from tourists visiting historic sites and the public and private investment in restoring historic buildings. This funding is both an economic and historical imperative that creates jobs and protects historic resources that might otherwise be lost forever.

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