

Testimony:

Thank you Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and Members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands for holding today's hearing and allowing me to testify on my bipartisan legislation – H.R. 820, the New Philadelphia National Historical Park Act.

I am proud to represent the 18th District of Illinois, which encompasses 19 counties in central and west central Illinois. Our district and the state of Illinois, commonly referred to as the Land of Lincoln, is rich with history and heritage. New Philadelphia completes central Illinois' 1800s freedom story. With anti-slavery writer Mark Twain to the west and President Abraham Lincoln to the east, town founder Frank McWorter embodies the central role of African Americans in their own freedom struggle.

If enacted, my legislation would establish the New Philadelphia National Historical Park in the State of Illinois as a unit of the National Park System.

New Philadelphia is located in Pike County, Illinois. Founded in 1836 by Frank McWorter, New Philadelphia is the first known town founded, platted, and legally registered by an African American prior to the Civil War in the United States. Over time, Frank McWorter used his earnings to purchase 16 family members out of slavery. Many African Americans and European Americans living at New Philadelphia later helped freedom seekers move North.

The site has already been acknowledged for its historical significance – it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and it is designated as a National Historic Landmark. The site is also included in the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program and the Smithsonian National Museum of American History displays many of the artifacts from this archaeological site.

In 2009, in qualifying for its National Historic Landmark designation, the National Park Service cited, “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.”

The site of this frontier community of European Americans and African Americans is a nationally significant archeological site, advancing our understanding of free, rural communities and the abolitionist movement in the antebellum era.

The New Philadelphia Association has done a tremendous job improving, maintaining, and promoting the site for the benefit of those living in the surrounding community and those visiting the area. However, including New Philadelphia in the National Park System would provide certainty and ensure its continued preservation. The National Park Service can provide the tools, resources, and expertise necessary to elevate the site to its fullest potential.

Including the New Philadelphia site as a unit of the National Park Service has strong, bipartisan support in the 18th District and in the state of Illinois. I was proud

that my legislation received endorsements from many local elected officials, community leaders, schools, businesses, religious institutions, and constituents.

To highlight a few – Illinois Department of Natural Resources, New Philadelphia Association, Pike County Chamber of Commerce, Pike County Historical Society, Pike County Economic Development Corporation, John Wood Community College, Jacksonville Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Pike-Scott Farm Bureau, and Looking For Lincoln.

I was also proud that the legislation received recognition and endorsement from several national organizations.

To name a few – American Anthropological Association, Society for Applied Anthropology, Society for American Archeology, and The National Trust for Historic Preservation.

It is imperative that we ensure sites like New Philadelphia are preserved and protected for years to come so that future generations may understand their important history as well as the lessons that history provides us.

Thank you again for holding this hearing today, and I yield back.