H.R. 4706
[Report No. 117–]

To establish the Blackwell School National Historic Site in Marfa, Texas, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 27, 2021

Mr. TONY GONZALES of Texas (for himself and Mr. VELA) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

NOVEMBER --, 2021

Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed
A BILL

To establish the Blackwell School National Historic Site in Marfa, Texas, and for other purposes.
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Blackwell School Na-
tional Historic Site Act”.

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.—The term “na-
tional historic site” means the Blackwell School, in
Marfa, Texas.

(2) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
the Secretary of the Interior.

SEC. 3. FINDINGS.

Congress finds as follows:

(1) The Blackwell School, located at 501 South
Abbott Street, in Marfa, Presidio County, Texas, is
associated with the period of racial segregation in
Marfa public schools and is the sole extant property
directly associated with Hispanic education in the
community, the remaining buildings having been
torn down after the school closed in 1965.

(2) The Blackwell School is a tangible reminder
of a time when the practice of “separate but equal”
dominated education and social systems. Despite
being categorized as “white” by Texas law, Mexican
Americans were regularly excluded from commingling with Anglos at barbershops, restaurants, funeral homes, theaters, churches, and schools.

(3) The spectrum of experiences of students and teachers at the Blackwell School constitute an important record of life in a segregated school in the context of the history of Texas and America.

(4) Mexican and Mexican American culture and history in Marfa is tied to the Blackwell School, which for more than 50 years served as a leading feature of the Hispanic community, illustrating the challenge of maintaining cultural identity in a dominant Anglo society. Yet today, Hispanic influences are seen in Marfa’s social and religious organizations, business and government institutions, and shared experiences of language, food, and music.

(5) The historic Blackwell School building is a physical record of the longevity and beauty of the distinctive design and craftsmanship informed by both traditional techniques and materials, and the transition from purely the vernacular to the period of materials, design, and workmanship made available after the arrival of the railroad. The original historic school building and grounds on which it
stands provide an authentic setting to commemorate and interpret the history of the Blackwell School.

(6) The Blackwell School is closely associated with the broad patterns of local, State, and national history in the area of school segregation. Mexicans and other members of the Latin American diaspora have placed a high value upon education as a means of economic, social, and political advancement.

(7) Mexican Americans and other members of the Latin American diaspora have placed a high value upon education as a means of economic, social, and political advancement. However, Hispanics and Latinos have not always had equitable opportunities and access to quality educational facilities in the United States.

SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BLACKWELL SCHOOL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.

(a) Establishment.—

(1) In general.—Subject to paragraph (2), there is established the Blackwell School National Historic Site in the State of Texas as a unit of the National Park System to preserve, protect and interpret for the benefit of present and future generations the Blackwell School, its role as both an academic and cultural cornerstone in the community in
Marfa, Texas, and its function within a segregated system of education in Texas and the United States from 1885 through 1965.

(2) CONDITIONS.—The national historic site shall not be established until the date on which the Secretary has—

(A) entered into a written agreement with the Marfa Unified School District providing that the Blackwell School shall be donated to or placed by agreement into co-management with the United States for inclusion in a national historic site to be managed consistently with the purposes of a national historic site; and

(B) acquired sufficient land or interests in land within the boundaries of the national historic site to constitute a manageable unit.

(b) BOUNDARIES.—The boundaries of the national historic site shall be the boundaries generally depicted on the map.

c) AVAILABILITY OF MAP.—The map shall be on file and available for public inspection in the appropriate offices of the National Park Service.

(d) ACQUISITION OF AUTHORITY.—The Secretary may only acquire any land or interest in land located within the boundary of the national historic site by—
(1) donation;

(2) purchase with donated funds; or

(3) exchange.

(e) Administration.—

(1) In general.—The Secretary shall admin-
ister this national historic site in accordance with—

(A) this Act; and

(B) the laws generally applicable to units
of the National Park System.

(2) Management plan.—

(A) Not later than 3 years after the date
on which funds are first made available to the
Secretary for this purpose, the Secretary shall
prepare a general management plan for the na-
tional historic site in accordance with section
100502 of title 54, United States Code.

(B) Upon completion, the Secretary shall
submit the general management plan prepared
pursuant to subparagraph (A) to the Com-
mittee on Natural Resources of the House of
Representatives and the Committee on Energy
and Natural Resources of the Senate.

(f) Cooperative agreements.—The Secretary
shall enter into cooperative agreements with the Blackwell
School Alliance (and other local, regional, State, academic
and nonprofit partners) for interpretive and educational programming, technical assistance, and rehabilitation related to the national historic site.

(g) WRITTEN CONSENT OF OWNER.—No private property or non-Federal public property shall be included within the boundaries of the national historic site or managed as part of the national historic site without the written consent of the owner of such property.