



April 28, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As you formulate CARES 2 legislation, we write to urge you to utilize investments in historic preservation to ensure the continued operation of government services and to spur economic growth during the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask that CARES 2:

- avoid creating any legislative exemptions from permitting reviews designed to identify and preserve cultural resources and historic properties;
- provide \$120 million for State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices to enable their work while social distancing policies are in place and support local economic recovery;
- allocate \$300 million to existing competitive grant programs in the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF);
- incorporate the recommendations of the Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act (S. 2615/HR. 2825); and
- provide additional funding for the national endowments and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The Coalition for American Heritage represents more than 350,000 heritage professionals, scholars, small businesses, non-profit groups, and history-lovers from across the country who work together to support and preserve our nation's heritage resources.

Many of us are owners or employees of small businesses that perform much of the federally-mandated cultural resources review work required by NEPA, NHPA, and Section 4(f) of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The cultural resource management industry employs more than 10,000 professionals nationwide and supports more than 1,300 small businesses who are dedicated to ensuring predictability and integrity in federal projects. Were Congress to allow federal projects to go forward without review, it would risk the livelihoods of all those individuals whose jobs depend on a robust review process and would risk loss of our nation's cultural heritage.

Avoid Legislative Exemptions - Utilize Emergency Provisions

We ask you to oppose any legislative exemptions from the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) or the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These laws ensure that the American public has a voice in federal permitting decisions. Federal law dictates that any federal involvement triggers a review under

the NHPA and NEPA, and they contain provisions for emergency situations, like the COVID-19 pandemic. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation has already issued a blanket extension through May 29, 2020, for federal agency use of emergency Section 106 procedures regarding undertakings that respond to emergency and disaster declarations on the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID -19).

Insulate Essential Government Functions from Impacts of Social Distancing

Because of the pandemic, many SHPOs and THPOs are now working remotely without adequate technology. This lack of remote access to data hampers their ability to efficiently and effectively review federal undertakings. As part of the federal permitting process, Congress has tasked State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs and THPOs) with coordinating and supporting public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. SHPOs and THPOs store information that cultural resource management firms need to determine the potential effects of proposed federal undertakings. SHPOs and THPOs must review and approve the reports compiled by CRM firms before federal undertakings can proceed. Much of the data stored by SHPOs and THPOs is not digitized and is therefore inaccessible to employees or consultants. With libraries and state offices closed, it is difficult to obtain information still stored in paper files.

Additional funds for SHPOs and THPOs are required now to digitize files, make them accessible remotely, and provide digital platforms for submitting and reviewing projects. Providing these funds will ensure that SHPOs and THPOs can meet their responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and in future emergencies, such as extreme weather events.

Washington State has digitized all of their records and created an online project review tool called WISAARD. Their system is an example of what is possible nationwide with additional federal funds. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Washington SHPO has been able to respond to communications from the Federal Emergency Management Agency within hours, thanks to remote access of digital data.

Furthermore, providing SHPOs with additional funds for grants to certified local governments (CLGs) can help spur economic development by enabling SHPOs to award grants to local leaders who are working to rehabilitate historic sites in their communities.

We ask that Congress provide:

- \$30 million for SHPOs for survey, mapping, and technology tools
- \$15 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) to use as they choose
- \$75 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to allocate among America's 2,000 Certified Local Governments to support bricks and mortar rehabilitation projects, survey, education, and planning

Spurring Economic Growth through Competitive Grants and the Historic Tax Credit

Continuing to grow programs like Save America's Treasures will ensure that communities across the country can preserve artifacts, structures, and sites that are critical to telling our national story. These historic preservation programs help stabilize neighborhoods, attract investment, create jobs, generate tax revenues, support small businesses, and power America's heritage tourism industry.

We ask that Congress provide \$75 million each to the following Historic Preservation Fund programs:

- Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants;
- Save America's Treasures;
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities Grants; and
- African-American Civil Rights Grants, including its expansion to Civil Rights Grants for All Americans.

To aid in the economic recovery from the pandemic, we ask you to incorporate the bipartisan, bicameral policy recommendations of the Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act (S. 2615/HR. 2825) into CARES 2 legislation. Furthermore, we ask that you provide a temporary increase in the credit percentage for all HTC projects and other provisions designed to keep current projects on track.

The federal historic tax credit has a proven record of creating a high return on investment. Analysis by Rutgers University indicates that the federal government ultimately received more than \$1.20 in tax revenues for every \$1.00 it provides in historic tax credits.

A temporary increase in the credit percentage for HTC projects will help stimulate job creation and catalyze community investment.

Strengthening the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)

We appreciate the CARES Act funds provided for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Service (IMLS). As employees and supporters of museums, historic sites, libraries, archives, universities, and other cultural non-profits, we respectfully ask for continued assistance in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Widespread closures have paralyzed our ability to earn income. At the same time, school closures across the country make our educational and enrichment activities more vital than ever. We ask for continued assistance so that the arts and cultural sector of our economy can continue to nourish and serve the nation during this pandemic.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to help our country manage the impacts of this crisis. We appreciate the U.S. Congress's work to assist non-profits and small businesses through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). We take pride in our work to safeguard America's cultural heritage, and the PPP has been vital to keeping our organizations and businesses solvent during this difficult time. We look forward to working with you to safeguard our cultural heritage in the face of ongoing challenges.

Sincerely,

Coalition for American Heritage
American Anthropological Association
American Cultural Resources Association
Society for American Archaeology
Society for Historical Archaeology

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