

509 Signatures on the petition as of May 16

Comments: As a women's history
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

2. Name: Eileen Boris on 2014-04
Comments:
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

3. Name: Nancy F. Cott on 2014-0
Comments: Trumbull Professor of
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

4. Name: Maria Bucur on 2014-04-
Comments:
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

5. Name: Philippa Strum on 2014-0
Comments: A museum devoted to
of scholars of women's history. We
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

6. Name: Wendy Chmielewski on 2014-0
Comments: George R. Cooley Curator
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

7. Name: Matthew Basso on 2014-0
Comments:
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

8. Name: Louise W. Knight on 2014-04-
Comments:
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

9. Name: Jennifer Thigpen on 2014-0
Comments:
Affiliation (for identification purposes)


10. Name: Sara M. Evans on 2014-04-
Comments:
Affiliation (for identification purposes)

11. Name: Jane Kamensky on 2014-04

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An Appeal to the Women of the United States Senate



An Appeal to the Women of the United States Senate
From Women's Historians of the United States
Regarding your support for S. 398, To Establish the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Women's History Museum

The signers of this petition recognize and thank you for all you have done, and will do, for the women of the United States through your service in the Senate. We understand that most of you have already agreed to sponsor or co-sponsor S. 398. As women's historians and scholars of women, many of us specializing in the women of the United States, as well as museum experts, public historians, and other professionals concerned with issues of women and gender, we wholeheartedly support the idea of creating a museum of American women's history in the Nation's capital. Nevertheless, we are concerned that the bill, as currently written, does not mandate a place for women's historians on the Commission. This is a serious oversight. Thus we call upon you to consider submitting an amendment or amendments to improve your bill. We are aware that amending a bill that you have already supported is an unusual step for members of the Senate to take, but we believe that it is warranted because the project as currently constituted is at risk of failure. The non-profit National Women's History Museum (NWHM) has, over the past 16 years, done a great deal to publicize the need for a museum of women's history, indeed, without their persistence, there would be no bills in Congress today. Nevertheless, we fear that, under its continued leadership, the project will not come to fruition because NWHM's conceptualization and mode of presentation of U.S. women's history is unprofessional, inaccurate, and incomplete. Since the time when many of you agreed to co-sponsor the bill, the NWHM has dissolved its Scholars Advisory Council, thus barring a distinguished group of professional women's historians from participating in the project at the outset and making sure that it reflects the highest standards of scholarship in the field. We ask you to consider amending the bill in the interest of ensuring that any institution that emerges from this process be fully capable of presenting the history of American women with integrity and accuracy, as the women of the United States—indeed, the people of the United States—fully deserve. Accordingly, we propose the following amendment or amendments:

- In Sec. 3 (b), regarding the size of the Commission, the number of members should be increased from eight to twelve.
- In Sec. 3 (c), regarding members' qualifications, it should be stipulated that four of the members be historians of American women, four be museum experts, and four have experience in public or elected service, preferably with regard to women's history, or in fundraising.
- Sec. 4 (b) (2) (A), which calls for considering a role for the NWHM regarding fundraising, should be deleted.
- In Sec. 4 a requirement that the Commission hold a period for public comment should be inserted.

The following statements have been made in support of the historians' proposed friendly amendments to S. 398 by two members of the Advisory Council of the non-profit National Museum of Women's History:

"My experience as a journalist and author who writes biographies about prominent African American women makes it clear to me that historians and museum professionals are vital to the robust scholarly and intellectual exchange required to create credible museum exhibitions, programs and educational initiatives. Just as I would not attempt to write a biography without consulting historians who are experts in the subject matter, I cannot support a museum that does not include historians as integral participants in its development."



A'Leia Bundles, Author and Journalist
Member of National Women's History Museum [NWHM] Advisory Council

"A national women's history museum is vital to learning and honoring an often hidden half of history. If only already well-known women are honored, we will have repeated the problem of hiding women's history. Only historians and original research can complete a true and truly educational story.



Gloria Steinem, Feminist Activist and Author
Member of National Women's History Museum [NWHM] Advisory Council

Historians and Friends for a National Women's History Museum

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

To Proposed Amendments to S. 398

Attachment to May 16, 2014 letter from A'Lelia Bundles and Gloria Steinem

For further information, please contact:

Louise W. Knight: (847) 224-0122; lwk@louisewknight.com

Sonya Michel: (301) 367-6798 or (301) 680-0036; Michel.sonya@gmail.com

Proposed Amendment #1: Requiring that professional historians and/or museum professionals serve on the commission.

This requirement is simply best practice. The law that created the commission for the National Museum of African American History and Culture includes such a requirement. The commission for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which was created by the President, not the Congress, held extensive public hearings.

The largest professional historians organizations in the United States, the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the National Coalition for History, have endorsed this proposed amendment. The AHA's letters to one of the House members may be found at www.theccwh.org under "Historians and Friends for a National Women's History Museum."

It should also be noted that NWHM has long had a troubled relationship with professional women's historians. Founded in 1996, it dissolved its first scholars advisory council about two years later and then waited 13 years to create a second one. Initially NWHM consulted this council only sporadically; more recently, it chose not to consult it at all. In March 2014 it disbanded the council, arguing that the input of historians was not needed until after the commission had done its work. Historians reviewing the historical exhibits have been dismayed by their superficiality, lack of professionalism, and frequent inaccuracies.

For further information about the views of historians regarding the dismissal of the Scholars Advisory Council and their issues with S. 398, see the following links:

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117259/national-womens-history-museum-apparently-doesnt-much-care-w>

publichistorycommons.org/womens-history-museum-without-womens-historians/

www.ipetitions.com/petition/an-appeal-to-the-women-of-the-united-states-senate/

Proposed Amendment #2: Eliminating a role for National Women's History Museum in fundraising:

It is unusual for the authorizing legislation for a museum commission to name a specific nonprofit to participate in developing the fundraising plan. This has not been the case with the other legislation authorizing the commissions for new museums on the National Mall.

Moreover, NWHM's fundraising record raises serious questions about its capacities. Over a period of 18 years, beginning in 1996, the nonprofit has raised roughly \$16 million. How has this money been spent or allocated?

According to <http://nwhm.org/html/about/fag/NWHMFinancialStatements2012.pdf>, NWHM's audited financial statement for 2012, almost all of that money has been spent already. The nonprofit held net assets of some \$2 million at the end of its 2012 fiscal year, during which time NWHM raised \$1.57 million and spent \$1.42 million. Furthermore, as a chart in the audited statement shows, total fundraising peaked in 2010 and has been declining 25 percent annually since. In other words, NWHM raises just about enough money to cover its own expenses; essentially, it is fundraising to perpetuate itself.

At the same time, according to this financial statement, it has failed to set up a separate capital fund for purchasing land and/or constructing a building, despite the fact that these are the goals for fundraising stated on its website and in direct-mail solicitations. Why has a capital fund not been established, and why isn't some of the money raised each year being allocated to that fund?

Proposed Amendment #3: Funding the commission privately.

S. 398 does not follow the precedent established for other recent museum commissions (for the Latino Museum and the National Museum of African American History and Culture) by authorizing the Department of Interior to fund the commission's costs, including per diem payments to commissioners. Instead, Sec. 8 (a) stipulates that all the costs of the commission, which might operate as long as 18 months, will be paid for by the commission itself. Who, exactly, will be providing the funding? Why should a commission to study and plan for a women's history museum be any different? This feels like second-class status for such a museum, something presumably no one wishes.

In a recent statement on NWHM's website (www.nwhm.org, accessed April 20, 2014), NWHM's president and CEO Joan Wages stated that "NWHM has offered to underwrite the costs of the Commission." If this or any other nonprofit organization is to fund the commission, then the commission's work effectively becomes an extension of the nonprofit itself.

Proposed Amendment #4: Requiring the commission to receive public comments.

As the eight-member commission meets to study the proposed idea of creating a national women's history museum, it is simply common sense and good practice to require that it consult the views of the public and of professionals with related interests. S. 398 leaves it to the commission's discretion whether it will organize a national conference. This means that the half of the population whose history is to be presented in the museum may end up having no voice in its creation, and the project may lose the benefit of having input from the many historians and museum professionals with expertise in the field of women's history.