**Historians and Friends for a National Women’s History Museum**

May 16, 2014

Re: S. 398, “To Establish the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Women's History Museum”

Dear Senator Collins:

We write to you as the sponsor of the above bill to indicate our strong support for the idea of a national women’s history museum, but also to share some specific concerns about the legislation in its current form. We are a few of the more than 500 historians, museum experts, and others who have signed a petition addressing these issues, and we have the support of A’Lelia Bundles and Gloria Steinem, members of the National Women’s History Museum [NWHM] Advisory Council who have made statements endorsing our position.

Our concerns are elaborated below; background information, a copy of the petition, and the statements by Ms. Bundles and Ms. Steinem are attached.

We propose the following improvements to the bill:

1. Because the bill does not *require* that professional historians or museum professionals serve as members of the commission, we recommend that Section 3 (c) be amended to read:

(c) QUALIFICATIONS- Members of the Commission shall include persons drawn from the membership of the following professional organizations:

(1) Professional museum associations

(2) Academic institutions and associations committed to the research and study of American women’s history.

Reasons: It is standard that laws establishing national museum commissions include such requirements. (The language we suggest follows the precedent of the law authorizing the National Museum of African American History and Culture Commission.) The two largest professional historians’ organizations in the United States, the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians, as well as the National Coalition for History, the profession’s “national voice,” are also supporting this mandate, along with over 500 historians, museum professionals and other experts who have signed a petition calling for this change.

2. Because Section 4 (b) (2) (A) requires the proposed commission to consider the role of a nonprofit organization, National Women’s History Museum ,in developing a fundraising plan for constructing the museum, and because that organization is limited in its fundraising abilities, we propose that the reference to the NWHM be removed.

Reasons: The nonprofit National Women’s History Museum, which is not to be confused with the proposed museum itself, deserves praise for its ongoing campaign to create the museum, but, as far as we know, it is unprecedented for the authorizing legislation for a museum commission to designate that a specific nonprofit be considered for a role in the fundraising plan for the museum.

3. The bill stipulates that the cost of the commission be underwritten by private funds. We suggest that the Department of Interior fund these costs, as it did for other recent museum commissions.

Reasons: Dependence on a nonprofit organization for support is inappropriate for a national commission. The lack of federal funding assigns second-class status to the proposed women’s history museum commission and, because the necessary funding may not be raised, places its actual creation at risk.

4. The current bill does not *require* a consultative process that includes the interested public (holding a conference is only optional). We recommend that a provision be added to require a public conference, public hearings, or solicitation of public comments.

Reasons: The planning for any national museum benefits from advice and suggestions of many interested people and organizations, but especially when the museum’s purview is the history of half of the population of the United States.

We believe this nation urgently needs a national women’s history museum, one of which we can all be proud. We are convinced that in order to achieve that goal, these amendments to S. 398 are essential. It is in the spirit of making the Museum all that it could and should be that we ask for your attention to these proposed changes, which we believe will improve the bill.se

believe,will improve the bill.

Sincerely,

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Cc: Senator Mark Udall

 Senator Rob Portman

 Co-sponsors of S. 398

 Sponsors of H.R. 863

 Joan Wages, President and CEO of NWHM, for distribution to the Board of Directors and Advisory Council

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