

ISSUE BRIEF

Protecting African American Burial Grounds

ACRA Position

Congress should pass the African American Burial Grounds Network Act to protect and preserve African American burial grounds.

Background

African American burial grounds are a vital part of our nation's heritage. They are the resting places of countless former enslaved individuals, freedmen, civil rights champions, military veterans, community leaders and beloved family members.

From the early days of our Republic to the Jim Crow era, African American families were often barred from burying their loved ones in White cemeteries. Large numbers of African American burial sites lack any official record of their existence, and many have been neglected and abused over time, effectively erasing the memory of countless Americans whose history deserves to be told. In many areas of the country, burial grounds are the only tangible properties that represent African American culture and heritage.

The African-American Burial Grounds Network Act, introduced in the last Congress by Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC), directs the Interior Department to establish a U.S. African-American Burial Grounds Network within the National Park Service (NPS).

The bill requires Interior to

- review existing and new studies and reports to inform consideration of sites for the network;
- furnish specified technical assistance;
- develop a program to train states, units of local government, regional governmental bodies, organizations, educational institutions, and private entities to carry out the purposes of this bill; and
- produce and disseminate educational and training materials related to African-American burial ground identification methods and best practices for caring for artifacts, developing interpretive tours and exhibits, preserving burial ground landscapes, heritage tourism initiatives and sources for grants.

Similar legislation was approved unanimously by the Senate in the last days of the 116th Congress. Enactment of this legislation will help honor the legacy of countless Americans whose stories are an integral part of our nation's heritage.

About the American Cultural Resources Association

ACRA is the national trade association supporting and promoting the common interests of cultural resource management (CRM) firms of all sizes, types and specialties. Member firms undertake much of the legally mandated CRM studies and investigations in the United States.

For more information, contact ACRA at info@acra-crm.org.