



FY2027 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR APPROPRIATIONS

**STATEMENT OF AMANDA STRATTON,
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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

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Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for giving the American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA) the opportunity to provide written testimony about the Department of the Interior's (DOI) appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2027. I am Amanda Stratton, ACRA's Executive Director.

ACRA is the national trade association supporting the common interests of cultural resource management (CRM) firms of all sizes, types, and specialties. ACRA member firms undertake much of the legally mandated cultural resource studies and investigations in the United States and employ thousands of professionals, including archaeologists, architectural historians, historians, ethnographers, and an increasingly varied group of other specialists in the educational, museum, and non-profit sectors.

CRM is a \$1.1 billion industry that employs thousands of people. The majority of CRM firms in the United States are designated as small businesses under the U.S. Small Business Administration's size standards. They work in every U.S. state and territory to balance building infrastructure with the need to protect our nation's cultural heritage.

DOI plays an essential role in helping our nation value and understand our past. This work takes on special resonance this year as the country commemorates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Historic and cultural preservation programs are among the most fundamental means by which our nation celebrates the places that tell our story.

ACRA appreciates the Subcommittee's work over recent years to ensure historic preservation and cultural resource programs at DOI have adequate funding despite the challenging fiscal environment. Our recommendations outlined below reflect the reality

that, as the demand for cultural resource services continues to rise, the federal government must ensure that funding keeps pace.

National Park Service – Historic Preservation Fund (HPF): \$250 million

For 50 years, the HPF has enabled the rescue, conservation and rehabilitation of historic places, revitalized communities, and created opportunities for economic growth and job creation. It has done so without spending a single dollar of taxpayer money, because all HPF funds come from offshore oil lease royalties.

The HPF helps the National Park Service (NPS) administer heritage programs such as the National Register of Historic Places and the Historic Tax Credit (HTC). State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (S/THPOs), who under federal law are tasked with consulting with federal agencies on the effects of undertakings on historic properties, rely on HPF funding for part of their budgets. During the last five decades, the HPF has made possible the survey of millions of acres and identification of numerous cultural resources, provided millions of dollars for the rehabilitation of historic buildings and structures, and leveraged more than \$162 billion in private investment through the HTC.

We are grateful that in FY2026, the Subcommittee recognized the immense economic and cultural value of historic preservation and increased the appropriation from the HPF over the amount from the previous year and well above the President's request.

Despite these increases, investment has not kept pace with rising demand: SHPO responsibilities have increased, new THPO offices are established each year, and competitive grant programs have been created and expanded. Without adequate funding, S/THPOs often lack the capacity to carry out programs that administer program management. As a result, critical infrastructure projects risk being delayed.

The Subcommittee can help states, localities and Tribes continue their efforts to protect and celebrate our heritage by providing \$250 million from the HPF in FY2027, including \$70 million for SHPOs, \$34 million for THPOs, \$121 million for grant programs that support preservation projects across the country, and \$25 million for technology.

Technology

One of the most effective ways Congress can accelerate the federal permitting process while ensuring the protection of historic properties is to help S/THPOs upgrade their technology. Many ACRA members report that the lack of digitized records can affect their ability to complete federally required preservation reviews in a timely manner.

That is why ACRA supports proposals to include in the FY2027 HPF appropriation \$25 million for helping states and Tribes modernize preservation data systems and improve

access to historic resource information. This semiquincentennial year is a perfect opportunity for Congress to invest in 21st Century technology to assist communities protect, preserve, and document the places that tell our Nation's story.

Reauthorization

ACRA also recommends the Subcommittee include language in the FY2027 appropriations to extend the authorization of the HPF for one year, as the Committee has done in previous years. This authorization enables funds to be transferred from offshore oil lease royalties into the HPF. A lapse in authorization would deprive the Fund of monies that ultimately go to communities across the nation to support historic preservation work.

Although ACRA strongly supports legislation that would provide for a longer-term HPF reauthorization and increase the amount that is deposited into the Fund each year, a one-year extension provides an important backstop that guarantees the federal government's commitment to preservation endures.

Release of Funds

ACRA was deeply troubled by the challenges that S/THPOs faced in receiving their congressionally appropriated funds in FY2025. These unnecessary delays slowed infrastructure projects, hampered long-term planning, and forced the dismissal of qualified SHPO staff. These consequences also had a negative ripple effect on private-sector employment due to project slowdowns and cancellations.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's continued diligence in ensuring the HPF and other programs whose funding Congress appropriates is promptly disbursed by the Office of Management and Budget and the relevant agency.

National Park Service – African American Burial Grounds Preservation: \$3 Million

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 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.

Congress recognized the importance of protecting these sacred sites in 2022 when it authorized the African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program. This program supports efforts to research, identify, document, preserve, and interpret historic African American burial grounds, many of which have been badly neglected or lost to history. We

urge the Subcommittee to provide \$3 million to this vital program that enables our country to tell its full story.

National Park Service - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Grants: \$10 Million

ACRA requests the Subcommittee provide \$10 million for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Grants.

NAGPRA is the federal government's cornerstone statute recognizing that Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony belong to lineal descendants, Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations. These must be treated with dignity and respect.

Compliance with recently revised NAGPRA rules requires significant consultation among Tribes, museums, and curation facilities. The NAGPRA Grant Program supports the documentation, protection and repatriation of remains and cultural objects. Recognizing the increased demand the new rules have stimulated, ACRA urges the Subcommittee to provide \$10 million for the Program.

Staffing Levels

ACRA remains deeply concerned that reductions in force and voluntary retirements have depleted DOI and its sub-bureaus of the staff needed to comply with statutorily mandated requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and other laws protecting cultural resources.

Throughout the Executive Branch we have seen qualified cultural resource expertise lost in the name of government efficiency. Unfortunately, these moves often have the opposite effect, making permitting processes *less* efficient as remaining agency staff confront ever-growing backlogs of statutorily required duties.

ACRA appreciates the Subcommittee's inclusion in the FY2026 appropriations bill language instructing the Department's sub-bureaus to maintain staffing levels in order to fulfill their missions, including the protection of natural and cultural resources. We recommend that the Subcommittee include similar language in the FY2027 bill.

Conclusion

ACRA appreciates the opportunity to provide this written testimony to the Subcommittee. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the federal government continues to serve as a collaborative partner with those who work every day to protect cultural and historic treasures while building the infrastructure our nation needs to remain prosperous.