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Smithsonian Institution: Selected Legislation, 119th Congress

The Smithsonian Institution is a complex of museum, education, research, and revenue-generating entities primarily located in the Washington, DC, region, with additional facilities and activities across the United States and world. This In Focus discusses enacted and proposed legislation to authorize new facilities, relationships, or programming within the Smithsonian in the 119th Congress (2025-2026) to date. It excludes discussion of measures that consider Smithsonian appropriations; appointment of citizen Regents; potential assignment of congressional gold medals to the Smithsonian; and other proposals.

Transfer of a Space Vehicle

Enacted Legislation

P.L. 119-21, the FY2025 reconciliation act, provides for the transfer of a space vehicle designated by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator to a NASA facility subject to certain criteria. The law specifies that the space vehicle to be transferred must have flown into space, have carried astronauts, and be selected with the concurrence of an unspecified entity designated by NASA. Congress required that NASA obligate \$85 million for the transfer of the vehicle and construction of a display building; that NASA designate a qualifying space vehicle by August 3, 2025; and that the space vehicle must be transferred by January 4, 2027.

It has been reported that the transfer of the space shuttle orbiter *Discovery* from the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, in Chantilly, Virginia, to Space Center Houston in Texas, a science museum that serves as the official visitor center for NASA's Johnson Space Center, would comport with this language, as would several other space vehicles. NASA's authority to require the relocation of a space vehicle outside its custody is unclear and may be subject to question. For further discussion see CRS In Focus IF13071, *Transfer of a Space Vehicle: Issues for Congress*.

Pending Legislation

On April 10, 2025, Senator Cornyn introduced S. 1403. On June 20, 2025, Representative Weber introduced H.R. 4065. The bills, entitled the Bring the Space Shuttle Home Act, are identical in language.

The bills would require the transfer of the *Discovery* space shuttle from Smithsonian's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center of the National Air and Space Museum to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston.

S. 1403 and H.R. 4065 would require the Smithsonian and NASA to develop a plan to transfer the vehicle. Following transfer, the Smithsonian would be required to transfer title of the *Discovery* to NASA, which would then transfer

Discovery to a nonprofit entity it designates. The designated entity would maintain the vehicle and provide for public display. The bills would authorize such appropriations as may be necessary to carry out the transfer. S. 1403 was referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. H.R. 4065 was referred to the Committees on Science, Space and Technology, and House Administration.

Siting Authorized Museums

Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act

On February 13, 2025, Representative Malliotakis introduced H.R. 1329. On April 4, 2025, Senator Klobuchar introduced S. 1303. The bills, entitled the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum (SAWHM) Act, are identical in language, and would authorize the SAWHM to be located in the Reserve of the National Mall.

Smithsonian National Museum of the American Latino Act

On February 13, 2025, Representative Malliotakis introduced H.R. 1330. On April 3, 2025, Senator Padilla introduced S. 1304. Both bills, entitled the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Latino (NMAL) Act, are identical in language, and would authorize the NMAL to be located in the Reserve of the National Mall.

The bills—H.R. 1329 and S. 1303 for the SAWHM, and H.R. 1330 and S. 1304 for the NMAL, would authorize the transfer of sites the Smithsonian designates for each museum upon notification by the Smithsonian Board of Regents to the heads of federal agencies or entities with jurisdiction of the sites. Following written notification from the head of the entities with jurisdiction of the sites to various congressional committees, administrative jurisdiction of the sites would transfer from the agencies or entities to the Smithsonian.

The bills would require the SAWHM Advisory Council or the NMAL Board of Trustees to ensure that their respective museums “accurately and comprehensively represent the varied cultures, histories, events, and values held by” women for the SAWHM, and Hispanics or Latinos for the NMAL, and to seek guidance from a broad array of sources “reflecting the diversity of the political viewpoints and authentic experiences held by” women, or Hispanics and Latinos, in the United States, as appropriate. After an initial report, the Secretary of the Smithsonian would be required to report every two years thereafter, to various congressional committees on the Smithsonian's efforts to comply with those requirements.

H.R. 1329 and H.R. 1330 were referred to the House Committees on Natural Resources and House Administration. S. 1303 and S. 1304 were referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. Further information on the bills is available in CRS Report R44370, *Smithsonian Institution Museums: Selected Issues for Congress*.

Considering Creation of New Museums

Potential National Museum of Italian American History and Culture

On February 6, 2025, Representative Suozzi introduced H.R. 1102, the Commission to Study the Potential of a National Museum of Italian American History and Culture Act. The bill would require the establishment of a commission of eight members, with two each appointed by the Speaker of the House, the majority leader of the Senate, and the minority leaders of the House and Senate.

The commission would be required to submit a report to the President and Congress with its recommendations for a plan of action for the establishment of an Italian American museum in Washington, DC. A second report would consider the availability of collections to be acquired and housed in the museum; whether the museum should be located within the Smithsonian Institution; the costs of the museum; and other matters. H.R. 1102 would require the commission to develop a fundraising plan addressing the ability to support the costs of the museum through public contributions, without reliance on appropriated funds, and submit the fundraising plan to independent review. H.R. 1102 was referred to the House Committees on Natural Resources and House Administration.

Potential National Museum of Irish American History

On March 14, 2025, Representative Fitzpatrick introduced H.R. 2121, Commission to Study the Creation of a National Museum of Irish American History. The bill would require the establishment of a commission of 23 members, with seven voting members appointed by the President and three voting members and one nonvoting member each appointed by the Speaker of the House, the majority leader of the Senate, and the minority leaders of the House and Senate.

The commission would be required to submit a report to the President and Congress with its recommendations for a plan of action for the establishment of an Irish American museum in Washington, DC. A second report, in consultation with the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, shall consider the availability of collections to be acquired and housed in the museum; whether the museum should be located within the Smithsonian Institution; the costs of constructing, operating, and maintaining the museum; and other matters. H.R. 2121 would require the commission to develop a fundraising plan addressing the ability to support the museum through public contributions without reliance on appropriated funds, and to submit the plan to independent review. H.R. 2121 would authorize \$2.1 million for commission activities in its first year, and \$1.1 million for its second. The bill was referred to the House Committees on Natural Resources and House Administration.

Other Proposed Smithsonian Legislation

Black History Matters Act

On February 13, 2025, Representative Watson Coleman introduced H.R. 1359, the Black History Matters Act. This bill would direct the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) to study and report on Black history education in public elementary and secondary schools. The study would be required to identify the states and local educational agencies that require Black history education as part of the curriculum taught in public elementary and secondary schools, and assess the quality of Black history education and instructional material provided by schools. H.R. 1359 was referred to the Committee on House Administration.

African Burial Ground International Memorial Museum and Educational Center Act

On February 25, 2025, Representative Goldman (NY) introduced H.R. 1568. The same day, Senator Gillibrand introduced S. 728. Both measures, entitled the African Burial Ground International Memorial Museum and Educational Center Act, are identical in language, and would establish the African Burial Ground International Memorial Museum and Educational Center at the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City. The bills would require the museum to “become associated with” NMAAHC “in a manner to be determined by” the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the African Burial Ground International Memorial Museum Advisory Council established in the bills, and the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian. H.R. 1568 was referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources. S. 728 was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Codifying an Executive Order

On June 9, 2025, Representative Burchett introduced H.R. 3840, the EO 14253 Act of 2025. On July 23, 2025, Representative Self introduced H.R. 4730, the Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History Act. The measures would codify EO 14253, giving it the force and effect of law. Further information is available in CRS In Focus IF12975, *Smithsonian Institution: Potential Effects of Executive Order 14253*. H.R. 3840 and H.R. 4730 were referred to the Committees on Natural Resources and House Administration.

Redesignation of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

On July 23, 2025, Representative Onder introduced H.R. 4715, the MEGA Act of 2025. The measure would redesignate the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as the Donald J. Trump Center for the Performing Arts. H.R. 4715 was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Status of Pending Legislation

No further action has been taken on any of the pending measures described here as of the date of this In Focus.

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