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Smithsonian Institution: Selected Legislation, 119th Congress

This In Focus discusses enacted and proposed legislation to authorize new facilities, relationships, or programming within the Smithsonian Institution 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 was to 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 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 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 NMAL to be located in the Reserve of the National Mall.

The bills—H.R. 1329 and S. 1303 for SAWHM, and H.R. 1330 and S. 1304 for 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 SAWHM, and Hispanics or Latinos for 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.

H.R. 1329 and H.R. 1330 were referred to the House Committees on Natural Resources and House Administration. On February 3, 2026, H.R. 1329 was referred by the Natural Resources Committee to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. On February 10, the subcommittee held a hearing on H.R. 1329. On March 18, the Committee on House Administration marked up H.R. 1329, and ordered it to be reported to the House with an amendment by a vote of 7 to 4. 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; 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 some appointed by the President, and other voting members and nonvoting members 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, is to 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

African American History Act of 2026

On February 26, 2026, Representative Mfume introduced H.R. 7740. The same day, Senator Booker introduced S. 3953. Both measures, entitled the African American History Act of 2026, are identical in language, and would authorize the director of NMAAHC, in their discretion, to support African American history education programs in various ways, including providing resources; public engagement; disseminating research, curricula, exhibitions, and programming; expanding the NMAAHC collections; supporting teaching; and providing online content about African American history for educators, students, and families. The bills would authorize appropriations of \$4 million per year for fiscal years 2027-2031. H.R. 7740 was referred to the Committee on House Administration. S. 3953 was referred to the Committee on Rules and Administration.

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 E.O. 14253 Act of 2025. On July 22, 2025, Senator Banks introduced S. 2385. The next day, Representative Self introduced H.R. 4730. Both measures are entitled the Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History Act. The three measures would codify E.O. 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. S. 2385 was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. On December 9, 2025, a hearing was held by the committee’s Subcommittee on National Parks.

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

On July 23, 2025, Representative Ounder 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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