

STATEMENT OF VICTOR KNOX, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H. R. 3222, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY OF SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE 1657 SIGNING OF THE FLUSHING REMONSTRANCE IN QUEENS, NEW YORK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

February 26, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3222, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of sites associated with the 1657 signing of the Flushing Remonstrance in Queens, New York, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of H.R. 3222 with a technical amendment. However, we believe that priority should be given to the 27 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that have not yet been transmitted to the Congress.

H.R. 3222 authorizes a special resource study of the sites associated with Flushing Remonstrance, a document recognized as a forerunner of the First Amendment of the Constitution and one of the earliest demands for freedom of religion in what is now the United States. This study would determine whether the resources associated with Flushing Remonstrance meet the National Park Service's criteria for inclusion in the National Park System of national significance, suitability, and feasibility, and need for National Park Service management. The study would also consider other alternatives for preservation, protection, and interpretation of the resources. We estimate the cost of the study to range from \$200,000 to \$300,000, based on similar types of studies conducted in recent years.

Founded in 1645, Flushing was part of the colony of New Netherlands chartered by the Dutch West India Company. Increasing numbers of English Quaker settlers tested the principles of religious toleration established by the Dutch Republic and guaranteed to the colony by the Flushing Charter. By 1656, the colonial governor and council issued an ordinance banning all religious practice other than the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1657, after the prosecution of citizens for holding a Quaker meeting in their home, thirty non-Quaker citizens drafted the Flushing Remonstrance to the Governor stating, "Wee desire therefore in this case not to judge lest we be judged, neither to condemn lest we be condemned, but rather let every man stand or fall to his own Master." Its authors were arrested and fined while the colonial government continued its policy of non-toleration. John Bowne arrived in New Netherlands in 1661 and began to hold Quaker meetings in his home. The following year he was arrested, fined, and deported under the ban. Bowne made his way to Holland and presented his case to the Dutch

West India Company who immediately directed Governor Stuyvesant to re-establish the religious liberty in the colony guaranteed in its charter.

Two existing properties are known to be associated with the Flushing Remonstrance: the John Bowne House where meetings were held under the ban, and the Old Quaker Meetinghouse built after toleration was re-established. Both are recognized by the National Park Service for their historical significance. The John Bowne House, owned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, contains the portion built in 1661 that hosted the meetings and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Flushing Quaker Meetinghouse, owned by the Flushing Monthly Meeting, was built in 1694 by John Bowne and other Quakers and is a National Historic Landmark for architecture and religion. The study may also identify other resources associated with the Flushing Remonstrance.

We recommend a technical amendment to section 4(c) as follows:
On page 6, line 1, strike “Service” and insert “System”.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions about this matter.