

**STATEMENT OF DR. STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SCIENCE, 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. 4119, TO STUDY
THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING THE WEST HUNTER
STREET BAPTIST CHURCH IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA, AS A UNIT OF THE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.**

July 29, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 4119, to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the West Hunter Street Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of H.R. 4119 with amendments. However, we believe that priority should be given to the 24 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 Congress.

H.R. 4119 authorizes a special resource study of the original location of the West Hunter Street Baptist Church, located at 775 Martin Luther King Junior Drive SW, Atlanta, Georgia. This study would evaluate the West Hunter Street Baptist Church and the surrounding area to determine whether they meet the National Park Service's criteria for inclusion in the National Park System of national significance, suitability, 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 \$100,000 to \$200,000, based on similar studies conducted in recent years.

Founded as the Friendship Baptist Church in 1881, the congregation moved in 1906 to a stone building on West Hunter Street, which was later renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. During the Civil Rights Movement, the West Hunter Street Baptist Church served as a headquarters for many civil rights workers and organizers, was the site of important leadership meetings, and doubled as a school for nonviolent protest during initiatives such as the Voter Education Project and the Freedom Summer of 1964. It was also a spiritual refuge for the men and women who devoted their lives to the cause. In 1973, the congregation moved to a new location on what was then called Gordon Street. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., a leader of the Civil Rights Movement and an associate of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., served as pastor of the church from 1962 until his death in 1990. Subsequent to his death, the street in front of the church was renamed Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard in his honor.

We recommend amending the bill and the long title to clearly define that the area to be studied will include the city block where the West Hunter Street Baptist Church is located. We will be happy to provide an amendment for this purpose.

We also recommend a technical amendment to section 2(c) to reflect that the name of the National Park System General Authorities Act has been enacted into law. The amendment is as follows:

On page 2, strike lines 21-24 and insert the following:

“subsection (a) shall be conducted in accordance with the National Park System General Authorities Act (16 U.S.C. 1a-5(c)).”.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement and I will be happy to answer any questions that members of the committee may have.