

September 17, 2020

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Collins:

The American Historical Association enthusiastically supports S.959, the Smithsonian Women's Museum Act, which would authorize the creation of a National Women's History Museum to be located in Washington, DC.

We are pleased that the proposed legislation establishes this new museum as a unit of the Smithsonian Institution, funded by the Congress as part of the Smithsonian budget on the same basis as other components of the Institution. Although the very establishment and existence of the museum would commemorate and honor the contributions and achievements of American women, it should go beyond mere celebration to document and interpret the full and complex histories of American women. We trust that the existence and the work of a museum dedicated to the histories of American women will not detract from the responsibility of all Smithsonian museums to treat women and men on an equal basis in their collecting, exhibits, and educational programs.

We also trust that in its staffing, governance, and broader consultation the museum will draw upon the vast scholarship on American women, which has expanded substantially over the last half-century. We're eager to help; we express some concern that neither the AHA nor any other professional association of historians was consulted in the preparation of this legislation. The American Historical Association was founded in 1884 and incorporated by Congress five years later, for the purposes of promoting historical studies and disseminating historical research. Historians of American women have played major leadership roles in the Association in recent years, and our membership includes scholars with expertise in any subject that the museum will seek to explore.

It would be most fitting to authorize a national women's museum during this centennial year of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, an important reminder of the centrality of voting rights to full citizenship. This history of American women is, in part, a history of incomplete citizenship, a reminder of how the impairment of any citizen's rights impoverishes the very essence of democracy. The AHA is proud to support this bill, and in the process affirm the central role women have played in the shaping of American history.

Sincerely,



James Grossman
Executive Director



Mary Lindemann
President, 2020