

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

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### Witness Statement

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TESTIMONY FOR H.R. 4613  
THE NATIONAL HISTORIC LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION ACT OF 2000

Presented by:

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The U.S. Lighthouse Society is a non-profit historical and educational organization incorporated to educate, inform, and entertain those who are interested in America's lighthouses, past and present. Our society has roughly 11,000 members widely distributed throughout the country and overseas. We have Chapters of the Society operating in the Chesapeake Bay area, Oregon, Washington state, and New York. The focus of the Society and its Chapters is lighthouse education and preservation. For example, the Society has a license from the Coast Guard to maintain and preserve the still-active New Dungeness Lighthouse in Washington state, a very remote lighthouse, which is open to the public. We also maintain and preserve the lightship LV605 near our headquarters in San Francisco, which is also open to the public. Here, in the Chesapeake Bay area, we work side by side with the Coast Guard to help them maintain and preserve historic Fresnel lenses. We have also totally restored the Fort Washington Light Station, and are helping to maintain the Thomas Point Shoals Lighthouse.

The message is one of volunteerism, partnering with Government agencies, and preservation of lighthouses and their artifacts. It is a message we share with all of our colleagues throughout the non-profit lighthouse community.

The U.S. Lighthouse Society strongly supports the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000. Our society feels that this Act will provide several value-added accomplishments. First, through Section 308 (a), it adds Congressional and statutory backing to many of the historic lighthouse education activities already underway by the Department of the Interior, namely through the National Maritime Initiative of the National Park Service. The National Maritime Initiative has led the way and worked in partnership with the Coast Guard and with the non-profit lighthouse community on such projects as the 1994 Inventory of Historic Light Stations, and the Historic Lighthouse Preservation Handbook, issued in 1997. These ongoing activities and the focus of Section 308 (a) are consistent with the ever-increasing, nationwide interest in lighthouses.

The biggest contribution of this Act is that it will provide a statute-based opportunity for non-profit organizations, educational agencies, or community development organizations to have "excessed" historic

light station properties conveyed to them for educational, cultural, or historic preservation purposes. Currently, if a historic light station is deemed to be "excess property" and no Government agency is interested in taking conveyance of it, a non-profit organization that wants to maintain it for historic preservation and educational purposes has to compete for this opportunity in public auctions. Quite often, non-profit organizations cannot effectively compete financially in these public auctions. Furthermore, after the sale, there is no requirement for the new owner to make the historic light station available to the general public.

This Act puts non-profit organizations on an equal footing with Government agencies in having an opportunity to take conveyance of the property prior to a public auction. In selecting an eligible entity, the Act appropriately requires consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer, who is typically well-informed about the historic lighthouse and can often attest to the credibility and viability of any local non-profit lighthouse organization. It also requires the non-profit organization to maintain the property in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, and to make it available to the general public. This will help guarantee that more lighthouses will be preserved by the organizations who have a passion for them, and that more taxpayers will be able to enjoy these former public and now historic properties. The Act also has appropriate provisions to ensure that the non-profit organization comply with its responsibilities or to have the conveyance reversed if it is unable to do so.

The Act, although not explicitly, also provides an opportunity for non-profit organizations to "team up" with Government agencies and have a historic light station conveyed to them in a collaborative manner, which may be even more of a "win-win" than either organization could potentially achieve on its own.

The Act provides the opportunities described above. The Act also requires the Secretary of the Interior to establish, within one year of enactment, a process and policy to implement this Act. This is where the details will be worked out, and it is a more appropriate place than the Act itself to accomplish this. For example, the Act requires that the historic light station be made available to the general public "at reasonable times and under reasonable conditions." The process and policy will need to identify how that "reasonableness" is determined. The U.S. Lighthouse Society encourages the Department of the Interior to continue to build on its track record of working closely with the non-profit lighthouse community in developing the required implementation policies.

In summary, we in the non-profit lighthouse community have demonstrated a capability to maintain and preserve our beloved historic lighthouses, and of working collaboratively with the Coast Guard and with the National Park Service. This Act builds on that demonstrated capability and provides us even greater opportunities to accomplish our preservation goals, and the U.S. Lighthouse Society enthusiastically supports it.

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