



**180 South Street, Auburn, New York 13021
(315) 252-2081, Telephone (315) 252-2570, Fax**

I am Karen V. Hill, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Harriet Tubman Home, Inc., Auburn, New York. I submit the following written testimony on Tuesday, March 24, 2009 before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands.

Chairman Grijalva and Members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, the Harriet Tubman Home, Inc. (HTH) an independent not for profit organization established by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion Church), known historically as the “Freedom Church”, to manage and operate the home site of Harriet Araminta Ross Tubman Davis known during her lifetime and throughout the world as Harriet Tubman, the “Moses of her People” is pleased to have the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of H.R. 1078, the “Harriet Tubman National Historical Park and Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park Act.”

The Harriet Tubman Home, AME Zion Church and the varied publics that support Tubman have never tired nor wavered in seeking “National Historical Site” status for the Harriet Tubman Home site in Auburn, New York. We especially thank Rep. Michael Arcuri and the co-sponsors of H.R. 1078 for proposing the establishment of the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park.

The Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn, New York and its many friends encouraged the national acknowledgement of Harriet Tubman which led to The Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study Act (P.L. 106-516, signed November 13, 2000). A prior special resource study in 1996 recommended further consideration of the Auburn, New York Tubman site for inclusion in the national park system. Therefore for it has been more than a decade of study to reach this point of legislative consideration regarding the legacy of Harriet Tubman. The enthusiasm of the Harriet Tubman Home and the AME Zion Church can not be overstated. The Auburn, New York site and its documented history as well as Harriet Tubman’s contemporary relevance represents the promise and virtue of America.

The Name of the Auburn, New York Tubman Park

The Harriet Tubman Home and the AME Zion Church request that the name of the Auburn, New York site is changed to the “Harriet Tubman Home National Historical Park” The Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn, New York is the place where Ms. Tubman spent more than five decades of her life. It is the only place in the world with the extant resources which documents Tubman’s life and contributions to her community and America. Through historic documents, public records and archaeological artifacts from the Auburn, New York Tubman home site we have been provided tremendous access to the life of the former slave who after serving her country in the military, took up the cause of women’s suffrage, fed the hungry, provided health care to the infirmed, shelter to the homeless and established a place for the aged indigent Negro to be cared for with dignity. Tubman’s commitment to service was life long. Her identification with the Auburn site as her anchor, her home was dynamic in the context of her life of service and her commitment to her community and friends. There are many Tubman descendents in Auburn, the Finger Lakes Region and throughout western New York State. These descendents as well as supporters of Tubman’s legacy view the Auburn, New York site as “Aunt Harriet’s Home”. It would mean much to all to make this modest change in the name of the Auburn, New York site. It is indeed appropriate to further distinguish the name of the proposed Auburn, New York site by adding “Home” in the naming of the park.

Rationale for Modifying Matching Funds Requirement

The Harriet Tubman Home and the AME Zion Church have been responsible and sacrificial stewards of the Tubman property for more than 105 years, keeping the assembled parcel intact because of a collective and unshakable belief that America would one day honor Harriet Tubman’s service to her country in the Freedom Movement which includes her military service and her humanitarian ethos. The ability to keep the assembled parcel intact for over 105 has not been without severe financial and human resource struggle. It would not have been possible without the contributions of former slaves and their descendents. This commitment to not let Harriet Tubman’s legacy die has led the Auburn, New York Tubman home site to be open year round, providing historic cultural tours to approximately eight thousand visitors annually, the majority of who are students.

It has always been a fundamental of the Harriet Tubman Home to insure that the Tubman site and its contributing buildings are preserved for future generations to experience and grow in their knowledge about the iconic yet humble life of the servant leader, Harriet Tubman.

The sustained contributions of many, as previously referenced, have facilitated the ability of the Harriet Tubman Home to embark on the current work at the Auburn, New York site that is centered on the preservation construction of three contributing buildings on the home site. The work scopes for the current preservation construction have been fully

shared with the National Park Service. The Harriet Tubman Home requests consideration for the documented contributions made over the past 105 years in: keeping the property intact; maintaining it; and conducting historic cultural tours year round. Applying a credit towards the matching requirement in our view is fair and makes good sense. This approach will assist the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in meeting the non-federal matching fund requirements more readily and insure the continuation of planned capitol improvements consistent with the historic preservation of the property.

The proposed Harriet Tubman National Historical Park does not have an interpretive center or a conference facility. This is sorely needed. To date, over 26,000 archaeological artifacts have been unearthed with no ability to share the findings with the public as a part of the visitor experience in Auburn, New York. Among the archaeological artifacts is Tubman's stamp of her name. This is an important discovery as Tubman could neither read or write. More recently the Tubman cistern was found below grade, behind the Tubman residence. Providing the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park with a credit, to be determined by the National Park Service for the long time contributions of the Harriet Tubman Home and AME Zion will help maintain the momentum for capitol improvements which will include an interpretive facility. The city of Auburn and the Finger Lakes Region has endured a long period of under employment exacerbated by the current economic climate. The Harriet Tubman Home has been able to hire local contractors and laborers despite these current conditions. The Harriet Tubman National Historical Park will be able to continue in this vein of adding to the employment base in Auburn in a more seamless and timely fashion if the Harriet Tubman Home is given a credit toward meeting the match for the previous contributions.

Inclusion of Tubman Barn as a Contributing Property

The Harriet Tubman Home and its consultant preservation architects and planners consider the Tubman Barn a contributing building on the property in addition to the buildings and sites referenced as "nationally significant resources" in H.R. 1078. The Barn was constructed under Harriet Tubman's ownership c. 1896. The barn is currently undergoing restoration. The restoration of the barn involves removing two 20th century additions, restoring the siding to the Tubman period of occupancy, a new wood shingle roof, new flooring, and new doors. The barn will be restored for use as a part of the expanded visitor experience, interpreting the life of Tubman on this site from 1859-1912.

In addition to the Tubman Barn, the Tubman Brick Residence and the Home for the Aged are included in the construction preservation activities planned for the Harriet Tubman Home. All construction preservation projects at the Auburn site are being conducted as per the standards for historic preservation of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Brief descriptions of the work to be undertaken in addition to the Tubman Barn are described below:

Tubman Brick Residence: The Brick residence was constructed under Harriet Tubman's ownership following a fire to a previous frame house in 1880. The brick house dates to c. 1883. The house is currently unoccupied and has never been used as a

museum or visitor facility. The preservation architects have uncovered several features of the Tubman period. The restoration of the house involves the missing porches, replicating the Tubman stair case, replastering the interior, and reconstruction of the Tubman Period Wood Shed. The house will be restored for use as a historic house museum, interpreting the life of Tubman on this site from 1859 to 1912.

Tubman Home for the Aged: The wood frame “Home for the Aged” was constructed c. 1870 on land adjacent to Harriet Tubman’s farm. In 1896 Tubman purchased this at auction in order to establish the Home for the Aged. It was then deeded to the AME Zion Church in 1903. The house fell into complete disrepair in the 1940’s and was rehabilitated and reopened as a museum in 1953. There once were multiple structures on this property including barns and two other houses. Harriet Tubman died on this site (not this house) in 1913. The house is currently used as a museum interpreting the life of Tubman. The second floor is unoccupied. The rehabilitation and restoration of the house involves the repairs to the exterior new porch, new wood shingle roofing, chimney restoration, and replication of a small rear wing. The house will be restored for use as a small site museum, interpreting the work and goals of Tubman on this site from 1896 to 1913.

Full Time Tubman Park Superintendent

The current work being done and the work that is anticipated at the Auburn, New York Harriet Tubman Home provides tremendous opportunity. It has atypical characteristics which involves engaging diverse publics many of whom have little or no prior involvement with National Park Service processes. This, combined with the unique contributions of Harriet Tubman begs for the commitment by the United States to have a dedicated National Park Service Superintendent on a full time basis. Establishing a national historical park in Auburn with proper management and resources from the beginning is critical to the long term success of the Tubman Park. The National Park Service leadership is a key factor.

Collaborations

Since the commencement of the Special Resource Study commissioned in 2000, the Harriet Tubman Home and the National Park Service have had an opportunity to engage in a rigorous and respectful process that has produced a healthy partnership between the Harriet Tubman Home and the National Park Service that can only serve the Auburn, New York site well as it embarks on a new era in its history made possible through H.R.1078. The Harriet Tubman Home is proud of its robust and earnest relationship with the National Park Service and believes that the Auburn / NPS relationship serves as one of the best examples of building trust and consensus building without sacrificing the integrity of the mission of the NPS on behalf of the United States. Without true collaboration and problem solving efforts, the support of the National Park Service by the Harriet Tubman Home would not be as strong as it is today. The United States is well served to have the committed men and women who serve as the country’s steward for preserving its rich cultural heritage in the national park system.

The State of New York has provided tremendous technical support at the Auburn, New York site regarding Interpretation. The role of Interpretation will have increasing significance in accurately telling the story of Harriet Tubman and sharing the customs and mores during Tubman's lifetime. The State of New York's Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service have facilitated the relationship between Auburn and its counterparts in Maryland. This has been, in our view a true benefit to New York and Maryland.

Support of Maryland Tubman Sites

It is only through the diligent and painstaking work of a diverse group of individuals committed to the legacy of Harriet Tubman that we will be able to share more thoroughly the life of Tubman from the cradle to the grave. Providing an accurate context for the Interpretation of Tubman's early years and her return to slavery to lead others to freedom is made possible by the work of organizations and state government in Maryland. Their work will become a reality through H.R. 1078 and shared with the world. Establishing the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties, Maryland guarantees that the United States is able to serve future generations well regarding Tubman's place in American History. The Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn New York lauds the work of the people of the state of Maryland on behalf of Harriet Tubman and looks forward to meaningful collaborative efforts that will enhance the visitor experience to the Tubman National Historical Parks to be established in Maryland and New York.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is known historically as the "Freedom Church". In addition to Harriet Tubman, the AME Zion Church was the spiritual home to Sojourner Truth and included Frederick Douglass, himself a minister, for a time as a member. The history of the church is steeped in a tradition of tireless work and advocacy. The AME Zion Church rescued Harriet Tubman when economic circumstances caused her to almost lose her property. The church committed itself to keeping the property, waiting for the appropriate vehicle to share the Tubman legacy more broadly. That time has come through H.R. 1078.

The AME Zion church is a modern day hero for establishing and funding an independent not for profit to manage and operate the Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn, New York. This action has permitted the Home to become an active site for visitorship and increased the ability to make resources available for the construction preservation projects on the contributing properties.

The Harriet Tubman Home and the AME Zion Church can see the demonstrated thoughtfulness and comprehensive approach to H.R. 1078. Establishing national historical parks in New York and Maryland best serves the United States and its future generations. H.R.1078 will allow Tubman constituencies based in Maryland and New

York to leverage public resources to maximize the benefit as the next era in Tubman's incredible contributions become more broadly known.

Many different groups identify with Harriet Tubman, yet it has only been in the last decade that scholarly, fact based articles and books have been written. The establishment of the Tubman parks and the support for scholarly work as cited in H.R. 1078 will generate a larger library in years to come of empirical works that depict the multifaceted life of Harriet Tubman.

The convergence of the completion of the National Park Service Special Resource Study and the introduction of a well thought out legislative approach to honor Harriet Tubman through the "Harriet Tubman National Historical Park and Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park Act" sends a strong signal that the time is now to move forward to honor the varied works of Tubman that have helped to shape our great nation and will provide great intestinal fortitude to the challenges of today as well as the opportunities that are ever abounding in America.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen V. Hill
President and CEO
Harriet Tubman Home, Inc.