

Timothy A. Slavin

Director and State Historic Preservation Officer

State of Delaware, Division of Historical & Cultural Affairs

Testimony on “HR 624 First State National Historical Park Act”

June 25, 2012

Chairman Bishop and members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, thank you for allowing me to submit this brief testimony on HR 624, which would establish the First State National Historical Park in the State of Delaware.

My name is Timothy A. Slavin, and I currently serve as the Director of the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs for the State of Delaware. In this capacity, I oversee the management and stewardship of a state-wide campus of forty-one historic properties, comprising 119 structures and more than 650 acres of cultural landscapes. In addition, I also serve as the State Historic Preservation Officer and oversee the cultural resources review of all federal projects undertaken in our state, as well as other preservation related activities.

I strongly support the passage of HR 624. This bill is the result of untold number of hours of public consultations, meetings with state and private agencies, and conversations with local residents. This has been a deliberate, arduous, and productive task, and the outcome could not have been more beneficial or useful.

The concept of a multi-site historical-based national park is something which is valid for Delaware and should be implemented by the National Park Service (with passage of this bill). The theme of “early settlement” through “birth of a nation” in Delaware is considered by many historians to be pivotal in conveying an understanding of Delaware’s unique role in American history. The National Park Service cited this in its special resource study, stating that Delaware “provides an important lens on the subject of how early colonial leaders struggled with the notion of breaking free from England” and that “Delaware exemplifies the character of an entirely new nation as the result of that quest for freedom and independence.” (National Park Service, Delaware National Coastal Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment, November 2008.)

The multi-site design for the park, likewise, reflects that history. Delaware’s waves of settlement included the Swedish, Dutch and English, all in different venues across a beautiful and sweeping coastal area. Under the proposed design, the “hub” of the park would be situated in New Castle, which includes one of the richest historical districts on the east coast, as well as a community of preservation-minded residents and property owners who are unparalleled in Delaware. The “spokes” of the park would allow for the important stories that contribute to an understanding of the early settlement and birth of a nation theme to be told in Dover and Lewes, as well.

The public acceptance of this proposed project and the amount of public input and enthusiasm for this bill should not go unnoticed. There has been a well-spring of

sentiment and support from across Delaware, with citizens participating in hearings and discussions, and offering many of the ideas that we see outlined in the bill. The City of New Castle has not only accepted its new role as the site for the park's hub, but has embraced that new role. As someone who manages historical properties and museums in New Castle, I can tell you that the specter of a national park in New Castle has brought with it a whole new level of public support for history and historic preservation in New Castle. If the park is implemented as designed—and I hope that it is—you will find a conscientious and welcoming community in New Castle.

Finally, there is a need for this park that deserves to be met. Delaware's history is our nation's history, and we need to tell that story in ways that all Americans can access it. The fact that we currently do not have a national park in Delaware would, in my opinion, not be reason enough to simply create one. The fact that we have historical resources which the citizens of our nation need to see and experience in order to understand and appreciate our nation's great history is something which we can no longer ignore. The need for this park is based on a need to tell our American history thoroughly and completely, and to include Delaware in that enterprise.

I am a big fan of the National Park Service. My agency works hand-in-glove with the NPS on an almost-daily basis through our work in carrying out the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act, and through their joint efforts, we have raised the quality-of-life for all Delawareans. We consider the NPS to be an exemplary steward of

our nation's heritage, and we are unblinking in saying that they are partners that we are proud to do business with.

But my admiration for the National Park Service is, at its roots, personal. My 16-year-old daughter was raised in Boulder, Colorado, and on my many monthly visits to her over the course of thirteen years, we claimed Rocky Mountain National Park in Estes Park as our own place. It's a place that we visited regularly, returning to some of the same footprints we left on previous trips. These visits have not only resulted in the two of us visiting other national parks, but, more importantly, have shown her the value of conscientious stewardship and the role that each person can play in preserving our nation's heritage.

We need to show the children of Delaware the importance of these values, and the passage of HR 624 gives us that opportunity.

In closing, I strongly support this bill and encourage its passage and implementation and stand ready to assist the National Park Service in any manner possible.

Thank you.