

Public Law 105-203
105th Congress

An Act

July 21, 1998
[H.R. 1635]

To establish within the United States National Park Service the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

National
Underground
Railroad
Network to
Freedom Act of
1998.
16 USC 461 note.
16 USC 469f.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1998”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.

(a) **FINDINGS.**—The Congress finds the following:

(1) The Underground Railroad, which flourished from the end of the 18th century to the end of the Civil War, was one of the most significant expressions of the American civil rights movement during its evolution over more than three centuries.

(2) The Underground Railroad bridged the divides of race, religion, sectional differences, and nationality; spanned State lines and international borders; and joined the American ideals of liberty and freedom expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the extraordinary actions of ordinary men and women working in common purpose to free a people.

(3) Pursuant to title VI of Public Law 101-628 (16 U.S.C. 1a-5 note; 104 Stat. 4495), the Underground Railroad Advisory Committee conducted a study of the appropriate means of establishing an enduring national commemorative Underground Railroad program of education, example, reflection, and reconciliation.

(4) The Underground Railroad Advisory Committee found that—

(A) although a few elements of the Underground Railroad story are represented in existing National Park Service units and other sites, many sites are in imminent danger of being lost or destroyed, and many important resource types are not adequately represented and protected;

(B) there are many important sites which have high potential for preservation and visitor use in 29 States, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands;

(C) no single site or route completely reflects and characterizes the Underground Railroad, since its story and associated resources involve networks and regions of the country rather than individual sites and trails; and

(D) establishment of a variety of partnerships between the Federal Government and other levels of government and the private sector would be most appropriate for the protection and interpretation of the Underground Railroad.

(5) The National Park Service can play a vital role in facilitating the national commemoration of the Underground Railroad.

(6) The story and significance of the Underground Railroad can best engage the American people through a national program of the National Park Service that links historic buildings, structures, and sites; routes, geographic areas, and corridors; interpretive centers, museums, and institutions; and programs, activities, community projects, exhibits, and multimedia materials, in a manner that is both unified and flexible.

(b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are the following:

(1) To recognize the importance of the Underground Railroad, the sacrifices made by those who used the Underground Railroad in search of freedom from tyranny and oppression, and the sacrifices made by the people who helped them.

(2) To authorize the National Park Service to coordinate and facilitate Federal and non-Federal activities to commemorate, honor, and interpret the history of the Underground Railroad, its significance as a crucial element in the evolution of the national civil rights movement, and its relevance in fostering the spirit of racial harmony and national reconciliation.

SEC. 3. NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM PROGRAM.

16 USC 469f-1.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of the Interior (in this Act referred to as the “Secretary”) shall establish in the National Park Service a program to be known as the “National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom” (in this Act referred to as the “national network”). Under the program, the Secretary shall—

(1) produce and disseminate appropriate educational materials, such as handbooks, maps, interpretive guides, or electronic information;

(2) enter into appropriate cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding to provide technical assistance under subsection (c); and

(3) create and adopt an official, uniform symbol or device for the national network and issue regulations for its use.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The national network shall encompass the following elements:

(1) All units and programs of the National Park Service determined by the Secretary to pertain to the Underground Railroad.

(2) Other Federal, State, local, and privately owned properties pertaining to the Underground Railroad that have a verifiable connection to the Underground Railroad and that are included on, or determined by the Secretary to be eligible for inclusion on, the National Register of Historic Places.

(3) Other governmental and nongovernmental facilities and programs of an educational, research, or interpretive nature that are directly related to the Underground Railroad.

(c) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS AND MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING.—To achieve the purposes of this Act and to ensure

effective coordination of the Federal and non-Federal elements of the national network referred to in subsection (b) with National Park Service units and programs, the Secretary may enter into cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding with, and provide technical assistance to—

(1) the heads of other Federal agencies, States, localities, regional governmental bodies, and private entities; and

(2) in cooperation with the Secretary of State, the governments of Canada, Mexico, and any appropriate country in the Caribbean.

(d) APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act not more than \$500,000 for each fiscal year. No amounts may be appropriated for the purposes of this Act except to the Secretary for carrying out the responsibilities of the Secretary as set forth in section 3(a).

Approved July 21, 1998.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 1635 (S. 887):

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 105-559 (Comm. on Resources).

SENATE REPORTS: No. 105-217 accompanying S. 887 (Comm. on Energy and Natural Resources).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 144 (1998):

June 9, considered and passed House.

June 25, considered and passed Senate.