



October 7, 2020

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Collins,

The Organization of American Historians fully supports the mission of the Smithsonian Institution to shape the future by preserving the national heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing Smithsonian resources with the world. To that end the OAH endorses the Smithsonian Women's Museum Act, S.959, which would authorize the creation of a National Women's History Museum within the Smithsonian system in Washington, D.C.

The OAH views S.959 as a crucial first step in the establishment of a national women's history museum that will "document and interpret the full and complex histories of American women." The OAH remains concerned, however, that professional historical groups were not consulted in the drafting of the legislation. Moving forward, the Organization calls for direct consultation with and involvement of professional historians, especially highly regarded scholars of women's and gender history, at all stages of the museum's authorization, development, and execution. The OAH applauds the naming of "scholars and representatives of organizations that are committed to the study of women's history" as a constituency to be represented on the museum's governing council, but reiterates that the museum project must deliberately and consistently engage scholars of women's and gender history and promote serious study of the multifaceted and diverse history of the nation's women.

Today, we see attempts to politicize the teaching and presentation of U.S. history, particularly related to groups that have been marginalized in the past as well as the present. That makes the establishment of a women's history museum conceived from and built on a foundation of rigorous historical scholarship more urgent than ever. This year's many projects marking the centennial of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution—including the Smithsonian's own suffrage exhibition—point to the possibilities for portraying the history of American women in ways that move beyond the simply celebratory. It is vital that we examine critically the many struggles and successes of American women who were part of a broad but not uncontested movement to secure a more complete measure of citizenship.

As the largest professional organization in the country representing historians of U.S. history, the Organization of American Historians is dedicated to promoting excellence in the scholarship, teaching and presentation of American history, and encouraging informed public discussion of and engagement with historical questions. The OAH, therefore, stands ready to be a willing partner in seeing the proposed National Women's History Museum to fruition.

On behalf of the Executive Board of the Organization of American Historians,

George Sanchez
President

Beth English
Executive Director