

**Testimony of Senator Susan M. Collins**  
**Senate Committee on Rules and Administration**  
**Hearing to Review S.959, Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act; and**  
**S.1267, National Museum of the American Latino Act**  
**November 17, 2020**

Good morning Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and members of this Committee. I want to begin by thanking you for holding this hearing on legislation to establish new museums, including the bill I have introduced with Senator Feinstein, *The Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act (S.959)*. This year, as we commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American women's suffrage and the decades-long fight for women's equality at the ballot box, it is fitting that we establish a lasting institution in our nation's capital to honor American women's history.

American women have made invaluable contributions to our country in every field: government, business, medicine, law, literature, sports, entertainment, the arts, and the military. Here in the Senate, there are a record number of women – 26 in all – serving together. Telling the history of American women matters, and a museum recognizing these achievements and experiences is long overdue.

In 1999, a Presidential commission on commemorating women in American history concluded that an “appropriate celebration of women's history in the next millennium should include the designation of a focal point for women's history in our Nation's capital.” In 2014, Congress took an important step toward realizing this goal when it passed legislation creating an independent, bipartisan Commission to study establishing such a museum in Washington, DC. After 18 months of study, the bipartisan Commission unanimously concluded, “America needs and deserves a physical national museum dedicated to showcasing the historical experiences and impact of women in the country.” I agree wholeheartedly with the Commission's conclusion.

Following the Commission's recommendations, Senator Feinstein and I introduced legislation to create an American Women's History Museum that would collect, study, and create programs incorporating and exhibiting a wide spectrum of American women's experiences, contributions, and history. The museum would be a part of the Smithsonian Institution, ensuring that it is free and open to all who visit Washington, DC, and representative of the diverse viewpoints held by all American women. It is important to emphasize that this museum will portray all aspects of women's contributions to our history, without partisanship or bias. Such a museum will share the stories of pioneering women such as abolitionist Harriet Tubman; the founder of the Girl Scouts, Juliette Gordon Low; Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg; astronaut Sally Ride; leading suffragists like Maine's own Florence Brooks Whitehouse, and many, many others.

The Commission also recommended a Smithsonian-wide American Women's History Initiative and since 2018, Congress has provided nearly \$10 million in federal funding for this important step toward creating the museum. Building on these successes, our bill calls for a funding commitment from both the private sector and the federal government, following the successful model used by the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Mr. Chairman, *The Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act* enjoys broad bipartisan support, and I want to thank the members of this committee who have cosponsored this bill, including Ranking Member Klobuchar, Senator Capito, Senator Fischer, Senator Hyde-Smith, and Senator Cortez Masto. The bill is supported by several organizations, including the American Historical Association, the National Coalition for History, the Women's Business Development Center, and many others. Finally, I would note that in February, the House of Representatives passed its companion bill overwhelmingly – by a vote of 374-37.

As our Women's Suffrage Centennial year draws to a close, I can think of no better way to honor those women and that momentous achievement than by passing *The Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act*. In Washington, we have museums along the National Mall that commemorate various aspects of our history and culture. We even have a museum to honor buildings, but there has been no national museum honoring the women who have helped to shape our nation's history. A museum dedicated to American women's history would help ensure that future generations understand what we owe to those American women who have helped build, sustain, and advance our country.