

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

September 16, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

We write today to request that you direct the National Park Service to accept a pending 40-acre land donation from the Commonwealth of Virginia to the Fort Monroe National Monument. The addition of this land would accomplish a longtime goal of connecting the eastern section of the property and would help protect the monument for future generations.

In 2011, then-President Barack Obama designated Fort Monroe a national monument using his authority under the Antiquities Act. Fort Monroe holds a special place in Virginia and our nation's history that tells a unique, complicated, and diverse story. Despite Fort Monroe's significance to American history and exceptional recreational value, the monument, as it exists today, includes a very small number of historic buildings and fee ownership of less than half the property's 565 acres. The fortress itself – the largest stone fort constructed in North America – remains in state ownership, while an easement allows the Park Service some control over its use. Virginia retains full responsibility for the fortress and the dozens of historic buildings on the property.

In 2015, the Commonwealth of Virginia agreed to donate approximately 40 coastal acres including additional land in the Wherry Quarter to Fort Monroe, to enhance and protect the monument. Following a thorough review, the Park Service indicated it could accept a land donation of approximately 40 acres in the eastern section of the Wherry Quarter. This donation would establish a physical connection between the two sections of Fort Monroe, creating an unbroken coastline along the Chesapeake Bay from Old Point Comfort to the northern end of the property. The Commonwealth remains committed to donating this property to Fort Monroe and is willing to work with the Park Service to determine the best use for the property.

The approximately 40 acres of coastal land contain several low-rise non-historic buildings, which could be demolished or utilized for alternative purposes. We understand the Commonwealth has continued to negotiate in good faith to lease these buildings to new tenants, which would mitigate any potential costs to the Park Service. Despite the expected additional modest federal financial responsibility that would be expected from a land donation, we believe the cause of protecting and enhancing Fort Monroe is worth the Park Service's additional investment. Fort Monroe has a unique and diverse history to tell and a tremendous amount of untapped potential we believe can be unlocked.

Acceptance of this land donation would demonstrate to the Commonwealth that the Park Service is a reliable federal partner that can be relied on to follow through on its plans. In recent years,

Virginia and the Park Service have endorsed a “One Fort Monroe” concept, which has the goal of elevating Fort Monroe as a national treasure and unlocking the landmark’s vast historical and recreational potential. Recently, the Commonwealth has worked collaboratively with the Park Service to open a new combined visitor center and hosted a successful 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration event regarding the arrival of the first Africans in North America. Moving forward with this land donation will help strengthen the relationship between the Commonwealth and Fort Monroe and help the monument move closer to realizing its vast potential.

We respectfully request that the Department of the Interior move forward with accepting this land donation from the Commonwealth of Virginia as quickly as possible. This transfer has been delayed for too long and the time is now for this donation to move forward. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Elaine G. Luria  
Member of Congress