

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICERS

P.O. Box 19189 * Washington, D.C. 20036-9189 * Phone: (202) 628-8476 * Fax: (202) 628-2241
www.nathpo.org

**Testimony for the Record
Subcommittee on Federal Lands of the
Committee on Natural Resources**

U.S. House of Representatives
February 11, 2016, Hearing

The National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) is pleased to submit testimony for the record on H.R. 2817, “The National Historic Preservation Amendments Act of 2015,” and H.R. 295, “The Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Historic Preservation Program Reauthorization Act,” which were considered during the February 11, 2016. NATHPO appreciates this hearing on legislative proposals that are of great importance to Indian tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian organizations, State Historic Preservation Officers, and the African-American community. Specifically, NATHPO supports H.R. 2817 and H.R. 295, as described below.

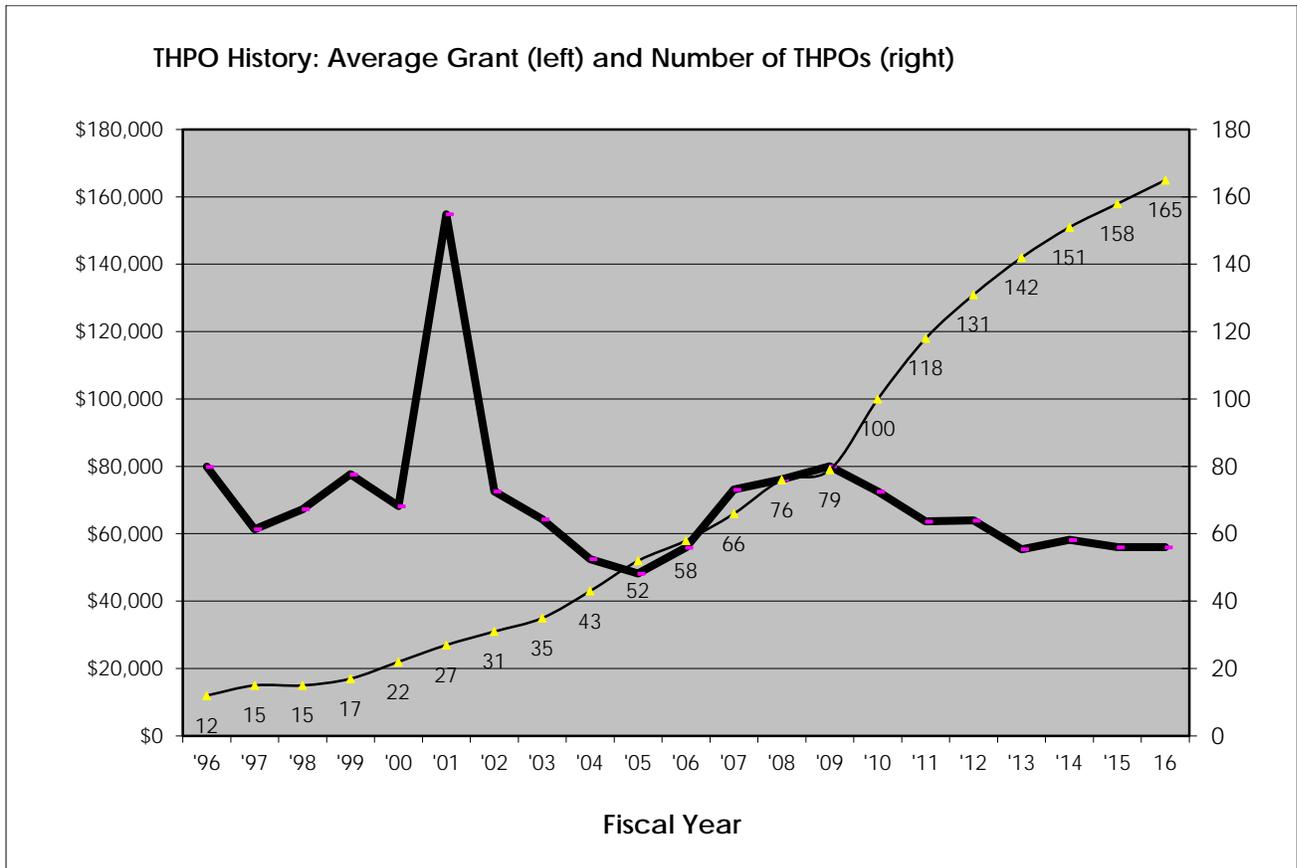
H.R. 2817, “The National Historic Preservation Amendments Act of 2015”

NATHPO appreciates the leadership of Congressmen Mike Turner and Earl Blumenauer for introducing this bi-partisan bill that extends the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) through FY2025. The HPF currently supports Indian tribes, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians, as well as State Historic Preservation Officers, the Underrepresented Communities grant program, and a Civil Rights grant program. Reauthorization of the HPF is necessary to provide certainty and continuity to Indian tribes, SHPOs, and other preservationists across the country who are working to protect our national heritage.

Importance of the HPF to THPOs: It is expected that there will be 165 National Park Service (NPS)-recognized Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) in FY16 that are eligible for HPF support. Each THPO represents an affirmative step by an Indian tribe to assume the responsibilities of the State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) for their respective tribal lands, as authorized by Congress in the 1992 amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act. Collectively, these THPOs exercise responsibilities over a land base exceeding 30 million acres in 30 states. For many tribes, the HPF is the sole source of federal funding for THPOs. It is certainly the main source of funding available to Indian tribes to implement the nation’s historic preservation programs.

What are Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs)? THPOs are federally recognized tribal governments that have entered into an agreement with the Department of the Interior to assume the federal compliance role of the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), as codified in 36 CFR Part 800. THPOs are actively involved with projects to improve Indian schools, roads, health clinics and housing. THPOs are also the first responders when a sacred site is threatened, when an ancestral home is uncovered, and when Native ancestors are disturbed by development. THPOs are also often responsible for their tribe’s oral history programs and operating tribal museums and cultural centers. They perform many functions and responsibilities in Indian country and, through their activities, represent an active expression and exercise of tribal sovereignty. For the past 20 years, these programs have become increasingly popular and successful with tribal governments. For the first time, they are recognized as the official representatives of cultures and societies that have been in existence for countless generations. THPOs first received federal support via the Historic Preservation Fund in FY1996; at the time only 12 Indian tribes participated in the program. Today about 165 Indian tribes operate official THPO programs, which are unfortunately severely underfunded. In the past year the THPO program received an important increase in support via the HPF, to help address local, on-the-ground needs, but there remains much work to be done.

Chart depicting growth of the THPO program:



H.R. 295, “To reauthorize the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Historic Preservation Program”

NATHPO supports H.R. 295 that would reauthorize the HBCU Historic Preservation Program through 2025 as an important step to ensure that all Americans have an opportunity to tell their unique stories and experiences.

Background on the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers:

NATHPO is a national not-for-profit membership association of tribal governments that are committed to preserving, rejuvenating, and improving the status of tribal cultures and cultural practices by supporting Native languages, arts, dances, music, oral traditions, cultural properties, tribal museums and cultural centers, and tribal libraries. NATHPO assists tribal communities protect their cultural properties, whether they are naturally occurring in the landscape or are manmade structures. In addition to members who serve as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) for their respective tribe, our membership includes Indian tribes that support our mission and goals.