May 20, 2021

RE: Site Consideration for the National Museum of the American Latino

Dear Secretary Bunch:

We hope this letter finds you well. We submit this letter with the greatest admiration for the historic work you have ahead with the creation of two national museums that will not only expand, but improve the understanding of our American story for millions around the country and the world. As partners and allies of this initiative, we wanted to commend you for how quickly your team has begun the work to lay the foundation for the National American Latino Museum. With that, we also would like to underscore how important the location of this museum is for us and generations to come.

We understand that your current process includes both the review of possible locations, as well as a determination of what is defined as the area known as the National Mall. While we are excited that an initial review of locations and design has begun, it is the latter task that has us greatly concerned. After all, the definition of the National Mall is well settled for every tourist that has visited our nation’s capital for years. For that reason, we ask that all recommendations submitted to the Smithsonian Board of Regents are explicitly located on the National Mall defined as the area from the Lincoln Memorial stretching past the Washington Monument to the U.S. Capitol Building.

The Mall, as envisioned by French engineer Pierre L'Enfant, was intended to be a grand avenue west of the Capitol where significant civic buildings would be located and where Americans could come to share their stories and learn about our shared history. That vision was later refined by the McMillan Plan, which proposed establishing buildings devoted to scientific purposes and great museums. As you know better than most, today the National Mall houses our most important monuments and museums; it convenes our Congress, inaugurates our Presidents, and welcomes millions of Americans and international visitors who come to our nation’s capital to learn about our shared history.
From the years 2009 through 2011, the National Museum of the American Latino Commission convened nine public forums across the country to gather feedback from leaders and the general public about the creation of the museum, including its location. On the question of where to build this long-overdue museum, the answer was unanimous: the museum must be on the National Mall, even if it takes longer to build. This should come as no surprise, as the National Mall is iconic. It is where people from all corners of the country and the world come to learn about the story of America—even though that story is incomplete.

Latinos make up nearly 20 percent of the U.S. population and have been an integral part of the American story for more than 500 years. But Latinos remain one of the most underrepresented groups in the Smithsonian Institution, according to the 1994 Willful Neglect report. The purpose of the National Museum of the American Latino is to correct this blatant omission and illuminate the American Latino story for the benefit of all. Any location beyond what Americans recognize as the National Mall will be a disservice to—not only the Latino community—but to every American.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you in the months ahead to ensure the appropriate site is selected.

Sincerely,

Estuardo Rodriguez  
President & CEO  
Friends of the American Latino Museum

Lili Gil Valletta  
Chairwoman  
Friends of the American Latino Museum

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cc: The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, President of the United States
The Honorable Raul Ruiz, Chairman, Congressional Hispanic Caucus