



To protect and preserve the irreplaceable historic resources  
of Wilmington and the Lower Cape Fear Region

March 9, 2022

Senator Thom Tillis  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tillis:

The Historic Wilmington Foundation (HWF) respectfully requests that Senator Tillis support the African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Act (S.3667) introduced into the U.S. Senate on February 17, 2022, by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and co-sponsored by Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT). The bi-partisan legislation would establish a program at the National Park Service to provide grant opportunities and technical assistance to local partners to research, identify, survey, and preserve these historic sites.

Since May, 2021, members of HWF have volunteered at Maides Cemetery under the leadership of community advocate and HWF Trustee Kathy King. Maides Cemetery is an abandoned, African-American burial ground located in Wilmington adjacent to Maides Park, located at 1101 Manly Avenue, Wilmington, NC. The burial ground contains graves reaching back to the late 19th century and displays traditional, African-American burial customs such as grave goods, concrete headstones, and flora designated unmarked graves. Thanks to the leadership of Ms. King and the tireless efforts of volunteers, the burial ground is now identifiable and maintained, however, much work is needed to provide the dignity and respect a burial ground should receive. This work includes a survey to identify unmarked graves (or buried headstones) and measures to preserve the diverse funerary art for generations to come.

Yet, Maides Cemetery is not alone. North Carolina's 7th Congressional District contains dozens of African-American burial grounds in desperate need of the grant opportunities and technical assistance that S.3667 may provide. Examples of other burial grounds include Freedman's Cemetery located off Carolina Beach Road, the burial ground located near Hampstead's Eden Lane that was disturbed by construction in March, 2021, and Southport's John N. Smith Cemetery, which earned designation on the National Register of Historic Places last year. HWF urges Senator Tillis to support S.3667 to advance the preservation efforts of North Carolina's 7th Congressional District's African-American Burial Grounds.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Travis Gilbert", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Travis Gilbert, Executive Director, Historic Wilmington Foundation  
CC: Historic Wilmington Foundation Board of Trustees