

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING S. 925, A BILL TO IMPROVE THE LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JULY 31, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 925, a bill to improve the Lower East Side Tenement National Historic Site, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of S. 925, which would add a nearby property to the Lower East Side Tenement National Historic Site.

The Lower East Side Tenement at 97 Orchard Street in New York City was designated a national historic site and made an "affiliated site" of the National Park System on November 12, 1998 (Public Law 105-378). The Lower East Side Tenement is owned and operated by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, a nonprofit organization. Similar to many other affiliated areas of the National Park Service, the Lower East Side Tenement National Historic Site receives financial and technical assistance from the National Park Service, as authorized by law.

After being shuttered for over 50 years, the property at 97 Orchard Street was carefully restored by the museum to depict the lives of immigrants who lived in the five-story tenement between 1869 and 1935. The Lower East Side Tenement is the continuation of the story of the experience of immigrants after they arrived in the United States. It explains what happened once after they were processed at Ellis Island and, before that, at Castle Clinton. Many immigrants lived in dwellings in New York's Lower East Side similar to 97 Orchard Street. The museum's efforts to expand the stories it tells that represent the contemporary immigrant experience complement the interpretive work the National Park Service is doing at the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and Castle Clinton.

S. 925 would revise the national historic site's 1998 designation to include 103 Orchard Street, which the museum purchased in 2007 to serve as a visitor center and provide exhibition and classroom space. The need for the kinds of administrative functions and visitor services that would be addressed by adding a property to the national historic site was recognized in the General Management Plan that the National Park Service prepared for the site in 2006. The bill would not provide any funding authority beyond that which current law already provides.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or members of the committee may have.