

Written Testimony  
For  
February 28, 2018 hearing on H.R. 3008 “George W. Bush Childhood Home Study  
Act”

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The importance of historic preservation cannot be understated. From landmarks honoring important events and people, to the preservation of historic lands, the role these sites play in our understanding of our country’s history is one of the fundamental tasks this esteemed committee is tasked to oversee.

I am here today to speak on behalf of the George W. Bush Childhood Home. As its Executive Director for nearly ten years, my primary focus has been to share with the public, the story of this unique site and the people who called it home. I and our Board truly feel that inclusion in the National Park Service would only enhance the visibility of this Presidential Site and help preserve it for future generations. Of the 76 Presidential Sites in the U.S., 54% of them are already owned and/or operated by the National Park Service. Of the remaining sites, most of them are run by city, county or state organizations. And while each of them displays a unique story, ours is the only one that can lay claim to being the home of two presidents (George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush), two governors (George W. and John Ellis (Jeb) Bush and a first lady (Barbara Bush).

For nearly 12 years The George W. Bush Childhood Home has operated as a separate entity, existing with the help of tour sales, merchandise sales, individual and corporate donations, non-governmental grants and occasional fundraisers. We own and care for 4 separate buildings (Historic Home, admin offices, gift shop and rental property). We are debt free and take every step to ensure that funds are used prudently. I and an Assistant Director are the only paid staff. We operate

with a small group of around 25 volunteers and we also provide area students with community service opportunities to earn hours for various programs. Our volunteer base is dwindling, in large part because of Midland's oil-based economy, which has exploded in the last several years. Many people who might have had time to volunteer with us in the past have returned to work either in oil related businesses or to fill service positions which have opened up due to the city's growth. This is another area in which we feel the National Park Service would benefit us. These findings were also summarized in the April 2015 NPS Reconnaissance Survey which stated

“In terms of the need for NPS management, the home at 1412 West Ohio Avenue is in excellent condition and well maintained by the nonprofit management entity, George W. Bush Childhood Home, Inc. Yet, as noted in this report, the nonprofit organization has insufficient staffing to develop comprehensive interpretive programming and community activities, and to professionally manage and care for its historic collections. The museum has two full-time paid staff, and relies primarily on volunteers to provide tours of the site. In addition, the volunteer staffing levels are currently insufficient to support existing visitation levels, and are often unavailable during some periods of the operating hours.”

Since opening in 2006, visitors from 84 foreign countries and all US states and territories have visited this site. Our goal is to “Honor the Past and Inspire the Future” through educational tours of the home, our programs for children promoting literacy and our school tours. Tours of this historic home focus on three areas which are of interest to our visitors: The restoration of the home, life in the 1950s and the Bush family. Let's look at some keys aspects of each of these.

Restoration of the home: The house was built in 1939 at a cost of \$4700. At that time it was approx. 1100 sf with a one car garage in the front of the home.



Around 1947 the garage was converted to a living room and a small sunroom was added to the East side of the home, bringing the total square footage to approx. 1500.



The home was purchased by the Bush family in 1951 at a cost of \$9000. They sold the home in 1955 and moved to a larger home in Midland. As noted in the NPS survey mentioned above,

“The home passed through numerous owners after 1955 and was altered in several ways through this period. Some of the changes were cosmetic, such as modifications of floor and wall coverings. Other, more dramatic, alterations included a new bathroom addition, new roofs over the front porch and west patio, and the replacement of some doors and windows. Since being acquired in 2001...the house has undergone careful restoration. The post-1955 bathroom and roof additions were removed. Restoration experts also removed aluminum siding and non-historic floor coverings and wall coverings. Structural problems associated with the roof required repair. Experts also had to abate lead-based paint, asbestos and mold. Finally period-specific floor coverings, wallpaper, fixtures, and other features reflecting the character of the home were installed. The restoration took nearly five years to complete.”



The cost of the restoration was nearly \$500,000. Architectural historians from around the world have marveled at the finely crafted details of the home including rounded-corner baseboard molding in the kitchen, the tiered, beveled returns under the windows, shiplap wooden walls and ceilings, and the intricate door handles. The older generations recall living in homes with similar features and the younger generation marvel at the relatively small size of the home, the lack of dishwasher, microwave and other modern amenities.

Life in the 1950s: The George W. Bush Childhood Home is one of the first homes of the 1950s to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In retrospect, it is easy to state that life in the 1950s was a simpler time. We had fewer distractions from television and other media. The pace of life moved a little more slowly. We took pleasure in knowing our neighbors, spending Sundays with our families, and shopping and banking where everyone knew you by name. Children walked or rode their bikes to school, often taking shortcuts through neighbors' yards to get there. A simple game of baseball was all that one could hope for.

Yet, without many of the modern conveniences we enjoy now, everyday activities took more time and effort. Most moms stayed home to fix nearly all the meals, clean, iron clothes and tend to the children, all of which were considerably more time consuming then. The period items throughout the museum reflect this different lifestyle and are fondly remembered by the older generations and fascinate the younger ones.



From the 1949 Hoffman television in the living room (the same model the Bush family had) to the 1950 refrigerator in the kitchen (donated by Laura Bush's mother), these items allow us to interact with our visitors and help them relive or better understand both the simplicity and the difficulty of life during that time period. We feel that this is one of the most crucial aspects of our tours for young children as we endeavor to get them to put away the electronic devices for a short time and appreciate books, strategy board games and interacting with each other in quality activities that include building things and using their imaginations.

The Bush Family: As a nonprofit organization we do not discuss politics or the political views of the Bush family. Our focus is on their early years as a young family finding their way in life. We discuss the remarkable early years of George H. W. Bush as a Navy pilot, marriage to Barbara Pierce, his time at Yale, the family's move to West Texas to learn about the oil business, move to California to expand his knowledge of said industry, subsequent return to West Texas, and their lives in Midland, TX. Many people are surprised to learn that the family had six children (George Walker. -1946, Pauline Robinson (Robin) – 1948, John Ellis (Jeb) – 1953, Neil – 1955, Marvin – 1956 and Dorothy (Doro) – 1959). More than a few are unaware that Robin died from leukemia in 1953, only a few months after Jeb was born. The difficulty of that event influenced George H.W. and Barbara tremendously and led them to a deeper appreciation of all lives.

The sense of community exhibited by George H. W and Barbara Bush throughout their public lives began long before they even thought of entering politics. This is an important point we stress to our guests and something we hope will influence them to give of themselves in whatever way they can. George and Barbara left a large legacy for Midland. They both taught Sunday School at First Presbyterian Church, served on the PTA of George W.'s elementary school, and volunteered at the new Midland Memorial Hospital. They raised money for our community theatre, first YMCA building and our first symphony orchestra. Barbara belonged

to the Midland Women's Club, started a consignment store for them and was a den mother for George's Cub Scout pack. George H.W. started two oil companies, served on several boards, helped organize Little League baseball in Midland and was a coach for one of the teams. All of this while have 3 children born during that time and losing their beloved Robin.

It is our hope that our guests, especially the children, can see how community service played a big role for the Bush family and become motivated to leave their own lasting legacy to their communities.

As an organization, we also strive to be involved with our community by offering classroom tours to all fifth-grade students in the Midland Independent School District and all grade levels for other local schools. For ten years we have welcomed over 2000 students annually, giving them an educational tour, actively engaging them in a classroom activity and sending them home with a small souvenir of their visit.

Another program we have offered for the last eight years is our way of honoring both Barbara Bush and Laura Bush and their literacy initiatives. We hold a reading program each month on the Third Thursday, where our staff and guest readers read several books to area children. The children get to take home a free copy of the featured book and are also provided refreshments during the program. We have given away author-signed books and have had a few local authors read their own works. One such local author was a 10 year-old boy named Jaden Evans, who read his 2<sup>nd</sup> published book "The Rain"

Our literacy program also features our Laura Bush Bookshelves stocked with books for children of all ages. These books are donated to us, leftover from previous reading events or purchased by us at discount sites. Any day we are open, children can come by and pick out a free book to take home and call their own. We realized several years ago that, despite our booming economy, many families are still struggling and unable to make buying books for their children a priority. Since inception we have given away nearly 10,000 books!



So as you see, The George W. Bush Childhood Home fits many of the requirements for inclusion in the National Park Service. We are a unique

presidential site, have strong ties to the community and represent the lives of true stewards of the American Dream.

The NPS Reconnaissance Survey summarized it best when they published:

“In conclusion, the NPS has determined that 1412 West Ohio Avenue appears to meet NPS criteria for national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for NPS management, and recommends that the home be further studied as a potential unit of the National Park System. A full Congressionally authorized special resource study would identify a range of management alternatives for the George W. Bush Childhood Home, including its potential as a national historic site.”

I hope that you will agree with their initial findings and fund this study. Thank you for your time and consideration.