

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4738

To direct the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to establish a history project to collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials, written materials, and photographs of those who were affected by COVID–19, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 28, 2021

Ms. LETLOW introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on House Administration

A BILL

To direct the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to establish a history project to collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials, written materials, and photographs of those who were affected by COVID–19, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “COVID–19 American
5 History Project Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS; PURPOSE.**

7 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds as follows:

1 (1) COVID–19 is a highly infectious respiratory
2 illness caused by a virus called SARS–CoV–2. This
3 disease has caused a worldwide pandemic affecting
4 millions of people and has fundamentally altered the
5 operations of the world’s cities, businesses, and
6 schools.

7 (2) The outbreak of COVID–19 was first de-
8 tected in Wuhan, China, and on January 21, 2020,
9 the first confirmed case of COVID–19 was diag-
10 nosed in the United States.

11 (3) The World Health Organization (WHO) de-
12 clared COVID–19 a global pandemic on March 11,
13 2020, and the President of the United States issued
14 a national emergency declaration concerning the
15 pandemic on March 13, 2020.

16 (4) To date, 194 million individuals have tested
17 positive for COVID–19. Of those, 35 million are
18 Americans; that is, more than one of every 10 Amer-
19 icans. Almost 4.2 million people have died from
20 COVID–19 globally, and over 610,000 deaths have
21 occurred in the United States.

22 (5) The first American received the COVID–19
23 vaccine on December 14, 2020. Since then, 163 mil-
24 lion Americans have been vaccinated and 188.5 mil-
25 lion have received at least one dose. The vaccine be-

1 came available to every American adult 18 and older
2 on April 19, 2021.

3 (6) While there are still remaining cases, and
4 healthcare professionals and researchers are tire-
5 lessly working to eradicate the disease, it is impor-
6 tant we begin work to fully capture the firsthand
7 personal stories of those impacted by COVID–19, a
8 major national event in the history of this country.

9 (7) Oral histories are of immeasurable value to
10 historians, researchers, authors, journalists, film
11 makers, scholars, students, and citizens of all walks
12 of life. Survivors of the pandemic, survivors of loved
13 ones who lost their lives to COVID–19, and frontline
14 healthcare workers should be remembered and can
15 provide valuable firsthand knowledge on how this
16 pandemic impacted their everyday lives.

17 (8) It is in the Nation’s best interest to collect
18 and catalog oral histories of Americans who were af-
19 fected by the pandemic so that future generations
20 will have original sources of information regarding
21 the lives and times of those who lived through or
22 died from the COVID–19 pandemic and conditions
23 under which they endured. These accounts will allow
24 an opportunity for Americans to remember those
25 who lost their lives and may learn firsthand of the

1 heroics, loneliness, horrors, and triumphs of the
2 healthcare workers who combated this pandemic.

3 (9) The Library of Congress, as the Nation's
4 oldest Federal cultural institution and largest and
5 most inclusive library in human history, is an appro-
6 priate repository to collect, preserve, and make avail-
7 able to the public an archive of these oral histories.
8 The Library's American Folklife Center has exper-
9 tise in the management of documentation projects
10 and experience in the development of cultural and
11 educational projects for the public.

12 (b) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this Act to create
13 a new federally sponsored, authorized, and funded project
14 that will coordinate at a national level the collection of
15 video and audio recordings of personal histories and
16 testimonials, written materials, and photographs of Ameri-
17 cans who contracted COVID–19, individuals who lost fam-
18 ily members and friends to COVID–19, and healthcare
19 workers who fought to treat the illness. These stories will
20 inform, assist, and encourage local efforts to preserve the
21 stories of this pandemic and the ones who lost their battle
22 to the pandemic.

1 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF PROJECT AT AMERICAN**
2 **FOLKLIFE CENTER TO COLLECT VIDEO AND**
3 **AUDIO RECORDINGS, WRITTEN MATERIALS,**
4 **AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF INDIVIDUALS AF-**
5 **FECTED BY COVID-19.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the American
7 Folklife Center at the Library of Congress shall establish
8 a history project to be known as the “COVID-19 Amer-
9 ican History Project” (hereafter referred to as the
10 “Project”) to—

11 (1) collect video and audio recordings of per-
12 sonal histories and testimonials of individuals who
13 contracted COVID-19, individuals who lost family
14 members to COVID-19, and frontline healthcare
15 workers who fought to treat the illness;

16 (2) create a collection of the recordings ob-
17 tained (including a catalog and index) which will be
18 available for public use through the National Digital
19 Library of the Library of Congress and such other
20 methods as the Director considers appropriate, to
21 the extent feasible and subject to available resources;
22 and

23 (3) solicit, reproduce, and collect written mate-
24 rials (such as letters and diaries) and photographs
25 relevant to the personal histories of individuals who
26 contracted COVID-19, individuals who lost family

1 members and friends to COVID–19, and frontline
2 healthcare workers who fought to treat the illness,
3 and catalog such materials in a manner the Director
4 considers appropriate, consistent with and complementary to the efforts described in paragraphs (1)
5 and (2).

7 (b) USE OF AND CONSULTATION WITH OTHER ENTITIES.—The Director may carry out the activities described
8 in paragraphs (1) and (3) of subsection (a) through agreements and partnerships entered into with other govern-
9 ment and private entities, and may otherwise consult with
10 interested persons (within the limits of available re-
11 sources) and develop appropriate guidelines and arrange-
12 ments for soliciting, acquiring, and making available re-
13 cordings, written materials, and photographs under the
14 Project. The recordings, written materials, and photo-
15 graphs shall be available on the Library of Congress
16 website and may be used to educate the public on the im-
17 pacts COVID–19 has on everyday Americans.

20 (c) TIMING.—As soon as practicable after the enact-
21 ment of this Act, the Director shall begin collecting video
22 and audio recordings under subsection (a)(1).

1 **SEC. 4. PRIVATE SUPPORT.**

2 (a) ACCEPTANCE OF DONATIONS.—The Librarian of
3 Congress may solicit and accept donations of funds and
4 in-kind contributions to carry out the Project.

5 (b) ESTABLISHMENT OF SEPARATE GIFT AC-
6 COUNT.—There is established in the Treasury (among the
7 accounts of the Library of Congress) a gift account for
8 the Project.

9 (c) DEDICATION OF FUNDS.—Notwithstanding any
10 other provision of law—

11 (1) any funds donated to the Librarian of Con-
12 gress to carry out the Project shall be deposited en-
13 tirely into the gift account established under sub-
14 section (b);

15 (2) the funds contained in such account shall be
16 used solely to carry out the Project; and

17 (3) the Librarian of Congress may not deposit
18 into such account any funds donated to the Librar-
19 ian which are not donated for the exclusive purpose
20 of carrying out the Project.

21 **SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

22 There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out
23 this Act—

24 (1) \$250,000 for fiscal year 2022; and

25 (2) such sums as may be necessary for each
26 succeeding fiscal year, except that no funds are au-

1 thorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act for
2 any fiscal year which begins after the expiration of
3 the 3-year period beginning on the date of the termi-
4 nation of the declaration of the public health emer-
5 gency declared by the Secretary of Health and
6 Human Services pursuant to section 319 of the Pub-
7 lic Health Service Act on January 31, 2020, entitled
8 “Determination that a Public Health Emergency
9 Exists Nationwide as the Result of the 2019 Novel
10 Coronavirus”.

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