

## 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.
  - (2) The outbreak of COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan, China, and on January 21, 2020, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in the United States.
  - (3) The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, and the President of the United States issued a national emergency declaration concerning the pandemic on March 13, 2020.
  - (4) To date, 194 million individuals have tested positive for COVID-19. Of those, 35 million are Americans; that is, more than one of every 10 Americans. Almost 4.2 million people have died from COVID-19 globally, and over 610,000 deaths have occurred in the United States.
  - (5) The first American received the COVID-19 vaccine on December 14, 2020. Since then, 163 million Americans have been vaccinated and 188.5 million have received at least one dose. The vaccine be-

- came available to every American adult 18 and older on April 19, 2021.
  - (6) While there are still remaining cases, and healthcare professionals and researchers are tirelessly working to eradicate the disease, it is important we begin work to fully capture the firsthand personal stories of those impacted by COVID-19, a major national event in the history of this country.
  - (7) Oral histories are of immeasurable value to historians, researchers, authors, journalists, film makers, scholars, students, and citizens of all walks of life. Survivors of the pandemic, survivors of loved ones who lost their lives to COVID–19, and frontline healthcare workers should be remembered and can provide valuable firsthand knowledge on how this pandemic impacted their everyday lives.
  - (8) It is in the Nation's best interest to collect and catalog oral histories of Americans who were affected by the pandemic so that future generations will have original sources of information regarding the lives and times of those who lived through or died from the COVID-19 pandemic and conditions under which they endured. These accounts will allow an opportunity for Americans to remember those who lost their lives and may learn firsthand of the

- heroics, loneliness, horrors, and triumphs of the
  healthcare workers who combated this pandemic.
- 3 (9) The Library of Congress, as the Nation's 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 a new federally sponsored, authorized, and funded project that will coordinate at a national level the collection of 14 15 video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials, written materials, and photographs of Ameri-16 17 cans who contracted COVID-19, individuals who lost family members and friends to COVID-19, and healthcare 18 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,
- and catalog such materials in a manner the Director
- 4 considers appropriate, consistent with and com-
- 5 plimentary to the efforts described in paragraphs (1)
- 6 and (2).
- 7 (b) Use of and Consultation With Other Enti-
- 8 TIES.—The Director may carry out the activities described
- 9 in paragraphs (1) and (3) of subsection (a) through agree-
- 10 ments and partnerships entered into with other govern-
- 11 ment and private entities, and may otherwise consult with
- 12 interested persons (within the limits of available re-
- 13 sources) and develop appropriate guidelines and arrange-
- 14 ments for soliciting, acquiring, and making available re-
- 15 cordings, written materials, and photographs under the
- 16 Project. The recordings, written materials, and photo-
- 17 graphs shall be available on the Library of Congress
- 18 website and may be used to educate the public on the im-
- 19 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).

## SEC. 4. PRIVATE SUPPORT.

2	(a)	ACCEPTANCE	OF	Donations.—	-The	Librarian	of
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- 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-
- gress to carry out the Project shall be deposited en-
- tirely into the gift account established under sub-
- section (b);
- 15 (2) the funds contained in such account shall be
- used solely to carry out the Project; and
- 17 (3) the Librarian of Congress may not deposit
- into such account any funds donated to the Librar-
- ian which are not donated for the exclusive purpose
- of carrying out the Project.
- 21 SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.
- 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-

thorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act for any fiscal year which begins after the expiration of the 3-year period beginning on the date of the termination of the declaration of the public health emergency declared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services pursuant to section 319 of the Public Health Service Act on January 31, 2020, entitled "Determination that a Public Health Emergency Exists Nationwide as the Result of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus".

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