

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

July 14, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

I write to request that you use your authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to designate Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, as a National Monument. I have worked for years with local community members to honor and preserve this unique site, and believe it is the ideal candidate for a national monument designation.

Fort Ontario is located at the mouth of the Oswego River, resting on the ruins of fortifications dating back to the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. The Fort was destroyed and reconstructed three separate times over the span of these conflicts, with the fourth and current construction garrisoned and rebuilt by the U.S. Army from 1838-1844.

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the Fort to be used as the only Emergency Refugee Camp for individuals fleeing the Holocaust. In August of 1944, 982 refugees were transported across the Atlantic to take refuge at the Fort under executive order of President Franklin Roosevelt. For eighteen months, Fort Ontario housed these refugees as they were provided food, education and medical care during their difficult transition to the United States. Residents of Oswego were some of the first Americans to interact with refugees and hear firsthand the horrors of the Holocaust. The Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum at Fort Ontario commemorates these refugees and there are still residents in the community that are able to recall their experiences at Fort Ontario during this indelible time in our nation's history.

In October 2018, the Fort Ontario Study Act was signed into law, which directed the Department of the Interior to conduct a Special Resource Study (SRS) to assess the Fort's historical significance and determine the feasibility of adding the site to the National Park System. While I expect the final SRS will soon be released, I am growing increasingly worried that many of the individuals who lived through some of the most significant moments of Fort Ontario's history will not be around to see its permanent commemoration.

Fort Ontario played a critical role in New York's history, but has a special significance for our nation. From an important military stronghold to a bastion of refuge and hope, Fort Ontario's past is emblematic of America's story as a resistor of oppression and champion of peace and opportunity. For these reasons, it is my hope that you swiftly take action to designate Fort Ontario as a unit of the National Park System. Thank you for your consideration of this request and I look forward to working with you to protect this site for future generations.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

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