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### RALPH DAVID ABERNATHY, SR., NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE ACT

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JANUARY 9, 2024.—Ordered to be printed

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Mr. MANCHIN, from the Committee on Energy and Natural  
Resources, submitted the following

### R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 507]

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, to which was referred the bill (S. 507) to establish the Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., National Historic Site, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of S. 507 is to establish the Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., National Historic Site.

#### BACKGROUND AND NEED

Section 3051 of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 113-291) directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the West Hunter Street Baptist Church to assess the site's suitability and feasibility for designation as a unit of the National Park System.

Established in 1906, the West Hunter Street Baptist Church, located in Atlanta, Georgia, was an important site during the 1960s civil rights era, with a series of leaders that engaged in efforts to combat segregation, secure voting rights, and generally improve racial relations.

Beginning in 1961, Dr. Ralph Abernathy, Sr. served for nearly 30 years as senior pastor for the church, using his position to engage the community in civil rights efforts. Abernathy was a key figure in the civil rights movement working closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Along with Dr. King and other African American

civil rights leaders, Dr. Abernathy helped organize the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Dr. Abernathy was with Dr. King in Memphis when he was assassinated in 1968. Following the death of Dr. King, Abernathy headed the Conference.

The National Park Service’s West Hunter Street Baptist Church Special Resource Study, completed in February 2022, found that the church meets all the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System. The full study can be found at [www.parkplanning.nps.gov](http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov).

S. 507 would designate the West Hunter Street Baptist Church as the Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., National Historic Site as a unit of the National Park System.

#### LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 507 was introduced by Senators Ossoff and Warnock on February 16, 2023. The Subcommittee on National Parks held a hearing on S. 507 on June 21, 2023.

Similar legislation, H.R. 737, was introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Williams on February 1, 2023. Similar legislation, H.R. 9202, was introduced in the 117th Congress in the House of Representatives by Representative Williams on October 18, 2022.

#### COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, in open business session on September 21, 2023, by a voice vote of a quorum present, recommends that the Senate pass S. 507.

#### SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

##### *Section 1. Short title*

This section provides the short title of the bill, the “Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., National Historic Site Act.”

##### *Section 2. Definitions*

This section defines key terms used in the bill.

##### *Section 3. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., National Historic Site*

Subsection (a) establishes the Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., National Historic Site as a unit of the National Park System at such time as the Secretary determines a sufficient quantity of land has been acquired to constitute a manageable park unit.

Subsection (b) provides that the boundary of the National Historic Site is as depicted on the referenced map.

Subsection (c) requires that the referenced map be publicly available in the appropriate offices of the National Park Service.

Subsection (d) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to acquire land for the National Historic Site by donation, purchase from a willing seller, or exchange.

Subsection (e) directs the Secretary to administer the National Historic Site in accordance with laws generally applicable to units of the National Park System.

Subsection (f) requires the Secretary to complete a management plan no later than 3 years after the date funds are made available to carry out this Act.

Subsection (g) allows the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements, leases, or other agreements to carry out services from the National Historic Site.

#### COST AND BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

The Committee has requested, but has not yet received, the Congressional Budget Office's estimate of the cost of S. 507 as ordered reported. When the Congressional Budget Office completes its cost estimate, it will be posted on the Internet at [www.cbo.gov](http://www.cbo.gov).

#### REGULATORY IMPACT EVALUATION

In compliance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee makes the following evaluation of the regulatory impact which would be incurred in carrying out S. 507. The bill is not a regulatory measure in the sense of imposing Government-established standards or significant economic responsibilities on private individuals and businesses. No personal information would be collected in administering the program. Therefore, there would be no impact on personal privacy. Little, if any, additional paperwork would result from the enactment of S. 507, as ordered reported.

#### CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED SPENDING

S. 507, as ordered reported, does not contain any congressionally directed spending items, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate.

#### EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

The testimony of the National Park Service from the Subcommittee on National Parks June 21, 2023, hearing on S. 507, follows:

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

JUNE 21, 2023

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on S. 507, a bill to establish the Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. National Historic Site as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 507.

S. 507 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. National Historic Site at the historic West Hunter Street Baptist Church in Atlanta as a unit of the National Park System after meeting specified requirements. The bill includes authorities for land acquisition and administration that are commonly included in legislation establishing a unit of the National Park System.

The legislation is based on the recommendations of the National Park Service's special resource study of the West

Hunter Street Baptist Church, transmitted to Congress on March 21, 2022. The study found that the Church met the criteria for national significance for its close association with Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. As a result of findings that the site met all the criteria necessary to be considered appropriate for addition to the National Park System, the Department recommended that Congress consider establishing the site as a unit of the National Park System.

Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., was a key civil rights strategist and co-president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for whom he was also a friend and confidant. Following Dr. King's assassination in 1968, Rev. Abernathy became the SCLC president and championed important civil rights measures, such as Operation Breadbasket and the Poor People's Campaign. Over the course of his life, Abernathy organized economic justice and labor initiatives, served as a peace negotiator (including at Wounded Knee) and a goodwill ambassador.

Rev. Abernathy pastored Atlanta's West Hunter Street Baptist Church and performed critical aspects of his work there, earning the church recognition as "the spiritual workplace of the civil rights movement." The church served as a school for nonviolent protest initiatives, hosted civil rights leadership meetings, and provided spiritual sanctuary for countless civil rights activists.

Rev. Abernathy pastored from the Gothic Revival-style structure erected in 1906 and located at 775 Hunter Street (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive) prior to relocating the congregation in 1973. The historic structure represents an integral part of American and civil rights history not currently represented elsewhere within the National Park System. The church holds national significance as the location of important civil rights organizing throughout the modern civil rights movement. National Park Service (NPS) protection would highlight the work and legacy of Rev. Abernathy, as well as the important role of churches in the civil rights movement. Civic engagement in 2017, part of the special resource study process, demonstrated high public support for NPS management of the site, and the site possesses strong potential for public benefit, enjoyment, and inspiration.

Adding the Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. National Historic Site to the National Park System would provide the historic West Hunter Street Baptist Church site with long-term protection and allow the public to learn about Rev. Abernathy, the church and their respective roles in the modern civil rights movement.

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

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee notes that no changes in existing law are made by S. 507 as ordered reported.

