

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 23, 2025

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Collins and Vice Chair Murray,

We write to urge the Senate Appropriations Committee to include language in the final fiscal year (FY) 2026 spending measures to pause any efforts to relocate Space Shuttle *Discovery* from its current home at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia, to Space Center Houston in Texas. We commend the House Appropriations Committee for adopting an amendment during consideration of the Interior-Environment bill, offered by Rep. Joe Morelle,¹ to prevent the Institution from using any federal funds on a relocation. We encourage you to retain this prohibition in conference negotiations. In addition, we urge you to include a parallel prohibition in the final FY26 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill to ensure that no funds from either bill can be used for such a transfer.

After the Space Shuttle program ended in 2011, NASA decided three of the shuttles would be displayed based on merit, institutional readiness, and geographic equity. Recognizing *Discovery*'s historical significance, it was deeded to the Smithsonian outside of a competitive process to be housed in our country's national collection. The competitive process placed Atlantis at Kennedy Space Center, *Endeavour* at the California Science Center, and *Enterprise* in New York. Houston's disappointment in not being selected is wholly understandable, but removing an item from the National Collection is not a viable solution. That decision has stood unchallenged for over a decade. It is worth noting that there is little evidence of broad public demand for such a move.² Revisiting those placements now, absent compelling public interest or legal authority, invites ambiguity, public distrust, and the erosion of institutional commitments.

There are also profound financial challenges associated with this transfer. The Smithsonian estimates that transporting *Discovery* from Virginia to Houston could cost more than \$50 million, with another \$325 million needed for planning, exhibit reconstruction, and new

¹ House Committee on Appropriations. "Committee Approves FY26 Interior and Environment Appropriations Act." Press Release, July 10, 2025. <https://appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/committee-approves-fy26-interior-and-environment-appropriations-act>.

² Yurk, Valerie, and David Jordan. "Shuttle *Discovery*'s Texas Transfer Launches Cost Concerns." Roll Call, July 28, 2025. <https://rollcall.com/2025/07/28/shuttle-discoverys-texas-transfer-launches-cost-concerns/>

facilities.³ These costs far exceed the \$85 million appropriated in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, P.L. 119-21. Dedicating hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to move an artifact that is already housed, displayed, and preserved in a world-class facility is both inefficient and unjustifiable.

In addition to cost, the logistics of moving *Discovery* pose serious risks to the shuttle. Past shuttle moves illustrate the difficulty: *Endeavour's* 12-mile drive through Los Angeles cost \$10 million and took three days,⁴ while *Enterprise* was damaged in transit when its wing clipped a bridge.⁵ Moving *Discovery* by barge or road would be far more complex, exposing it to saltwater, weather, and collision risks across a journey several times longer. As a one-of-a-kind artifact that has already endured the stresses of spaceflight, *Discovery* is uniquely vulnerable to these hazards. The heat tiles that enabled repeated shuttle missions become more fragile with age, and they are irreplaceable. Moving the shuttle would inevitably and irreparably compromise the artifact and render it unusable as a museum-quality collection item, permanently diminishing its historical and cultural value for future generations.

From a public access standpoint, the Udvar-Hazy Center, located in the Washington, D.C. region, offers free public admission and draws millions of visitors annually, including students, veterans, and international tourists. The Smithsonian provides *Discovery* with professional stewardship and global visibility. The Smithsonian is unique among museums for providing visitors with access to a national treasure meant to inspire the American public without placing economic barriers.

Houston has an undeniable place at the heart of America's space program, and no one questions the importance of showcasing that legacy with an iconic artifact. But moving *Discovery* isn't the way to do it. This shuttle has already flown farther and longer than any in history, and it belongs where it can be preserved and protected for generations to come. There are better ways to honor Houston's contributions, ways that look to the future of exploration while safeguarding the treasures of our past.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that you include language in both the enacted FY26 Interior-Environment appropriations bill, consistent with the House language, and the enacted FY26 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill to prohibit the use of funds for any relocation of Space Shuttle *Discovery*. Taking this step will preserve the integrity of Smithsonian

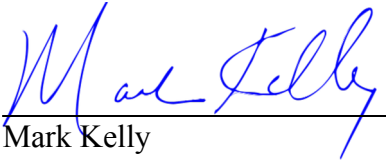
³ Aguiari, Moreno. "Space Shuttle *Discovery* Move to Texas Location Would Be Costly." *Bloomberg*, August 26, 2025. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2025-08-26/space-shuttle-discovery-move-to-texas-location-would-be-costly>

⁴ Associated Press. "Transporting *Endeavour* cross-town was a costly feat with an estimated price tag of \$10 million." *CBS News*, October 14, 2012. https://www.bing.com/search?q=Endeavour's+12-mile+drive+through+Los+Angeles+cost+%2410+million&cvid=a7f814123a314a2989cdd487ef1d957f&gs_lcrp=EgRlZGdlKgYIABBFgDkyBggAEEUYOTIICAQEQ6QcY_FXSACQczNzJqMGoxqAIAAsAIA&FORM=ANAB01&PC=U531

⁵ Associated Press, "Space Shuttle *Enterprise* Suffers Minor Wingtip Damage During Water Transit." <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna47681590>.

ownership, protect taxpayer resources, and ensure continued broad public access to one of the most iconic symbols of America's space program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Mark Kelly
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark R. Warner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent "M" and "W".

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tim Kaine". The signature is cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator