Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 10, 2011

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As members of the Hampton Roads Virginia congressional delegation, we write to ask that you use any powers afforded to the Executive Branch to assist with the accelerated designation of a portion of Fort Monroe in Hampton as a unit of the National Park system. The Fort Monroe site is included as part of the Army's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process and is schedule for closure in September 2011. The Fort Monroe Authority, charged by the Commonwealth of Virginia to preserve, protect and manage the Fort Monroe / Old Point Comfort area, has publically stated that the redevelopment of the Fort Monroe site should preserve and protect the historic features of the fort, and include a park area.

The historical importance of the Fort Monroe site is not in dispute. A National Park Service (NPS) team has already determined that "resources associated with Fort Monroe are nationally significant and likely to be found suitable for potential designation as a unit of the national park system." What is not commonly known is the significance the site has in the history of African-Americans. In 1619, the first Africans to arrive in the New World landed at Old Point Comfort, the land on which Fort Monroe stands. These first African-Americans arrived as slaves, marking the beginning of that practice in America. Nearly 250 years later, the site where slavery started in America was witness to the beginning of its end. During the Civil War, an order issued at Fort Monroe by Gen. Benjamin Butler classified slaves who were able to reach Union lines as contraband of war. The order meant freedom for any enslaved person who could make it to any of the U.S. Army-controlled forts in the South. Fort Monroe was overrun with slaves in search of freedom, and many were educated and enlisted at Fort Monroe.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War, a national conversation about the war has already begun. This is the first major anniversary of the war where a large number of historians and Americans are examining the war through the prism of the African-Americans who experienced the war both in the North and South, freeman and slave. That examination would be greatly enhanced with the incorporation of Fort Monroe into the National Park system.

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We request that you use all powers at your disposal to expedite this designation.

Very truly yours,

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Member of Congress

E. SCOTT RIGELL
Member of Congress

J. RANDY FORBES
Member of Congress

ROBERT J. WITTMAN
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior