



BILL HASLAM
GOVERNOR
STATE OF TENNESSEE

August 28, 2017

Tennessee Historical Commission Members
c/o Patrick McIntyre, Executive Director
2941 Lebanon Pike
Nashville, TN 37214

Dear Commission Members,

As you are aware, recent national events have resulted in renewed attention and debate around individuals honored on public property through statues, monuments or similar means and the state's role in that process. At the state level, the bust of Nathan Bedford Forrest located on the 2nd Floor of the State Capitol has generated considerable discussion. Similarly, at the local level, an equestrian statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest located at Health Sciences Park in Memphis has generated significant public discourse within that community.

State law establishes a process for public entities to seek action on these complex matters in an orderly and deliberate fashion. The Tennessee Heritage Protection Act of 2016 (T.C.A. § 4-1-412) places authority and responsibility with the Tennessee Historical Commission to grant or deny a waiver of the Act's prohibitions against public entities removing or relocating certain historic statues or monuments located on state or local property, including those I have previously noted. While I support the principle of local governments deciding what to place on their own properties, state law reserves this decision for the Historical Commission.

The Memphis City Council voted to transfer ownership of and remove the equestrian statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest from the Health Sciences Park in 2015, and in March 2016 the City of Memphis filed a petition with the Historical Commission seeking a waiver in accordance with Chapter No. 75 of the Public Acts of 2013, the predecessor to the 2016 Act. The Historical Commission did not approve the waiver, and the City of Memphis filed an objection on procedural grounds. The City of Memphis' petition still awaits action by the Historical Commission. Similarly, Middle Tennessee State University's petition submitted in October 2016 remains pending.

The City of Memphis has requested that the Historical Commission make a final determination on the petition at its next scheduled meeting, which will take place on October 13, 2017. I understand that as a

result of the objection by the City of Memphis, the Commission is first seeking to promulgate rules to establish criteria upon which to review waiver petitions under the Act. Regardless, I strongly encourage the Commission to take all appropriate actions to vote on the previously mentioned petitions at its October meeting. A refusal to act on the petition in October will only prolong the issue and result in criticism of both the established process and the Commission itself, as this process can work effectively only if the responsible entities act in a timely manner.

I appreciate the sensitivity around these matters and respect the significant responsibility placed upon you as Commission members. I thank you for accepting this responsibility and for serving our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Haslam", with a stylized, cursive script.

Bill Haslam