

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 19, 2015

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

We are writing to share our strong support for the James Merrill House in Stonington, Connecticut to be designated a National Historic Landmark. The National Historic Landmarks Program recognizes properties of exceptional significance in the nation's history, architecture, and culture. As strong supporters of the arts in Connecticut as well as across the nation, we believe that the James Merrill House is well-deserving of this designation.

James Ingram Merrill is among the most significant American writers of the second half of the twentieth century. Merrill won every major award for poetry given in the United States, including the Pulitzer Prize, two National Book Awards, and was Connecticut's State Poet Laureate from 1985 - 1995.

Built in 1901, the James Merrill House is located on Water Street in Stonington Borough. Merrill produced almost all of his major writing at 107 Water Street, and the house became a magnet for leading academics and cultural figures of the era. Merrill's work focused on socially significant issues throughout his life, culminating in his writing on the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1995, Merrill lost his own battle with AIDS and passed away in Tucson, Arizona.

After Merrill's death, the Stonington Village Improvement Association (SVIA) became the unexpected beneficiary of his 107 Water Street home. The SVIA decided to leave the apartment and its furnishings intact, and use the space as an area for writers to live and to work. As a result, Merrill's gift to the Stonington community became a gift to the artistic community, as well. The James Merrill House Writer-in-Residence Program currently provides living and working space to writers in search of a quiet setting to complete a project of literary or academic merit and has housed over 40 writers since its inception.

The National Historic Landmark designation would not just honor the memory of a prominent cultural icon, but it would also strengthen protection and preservation of the James Merrill House. Other prominent Connecticut landmarks, such as the *Charles W. Morgan* whaling vessel in Mystic, CT, have already been given the National Historic Landmark designation. We hope that the James Merrill House can soon be added to the National Park Service's list of National

Historic Landmarks, and urge the National Historic Landmark Committee to approve this property so it can be preserved for future generations.

Sincerely,



JOE COURTNEY  
Member of Congress



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senator

Cc: Mr. David Clapp  
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