



March 8, 2021

Benjamin Wilson
Director - Division of Historical Resources
19 Pillsbury St, 2d Floor
Concord, NH 03301

Appeal for Reconsideration in Response to Denial of N.H. Historic Highway Marker to Commemorate the Disappearance of Maura Murray

Dear Mr. Wilson,

On March 5, 2021 I received your letter denying the request to erect a N.H. Historic Highway Marker to formally recognize the significance of the disappearance of Maura Murray, my younger sister. Specifically, your letter details three reasons that denying the request is necessary “to protect the legitimacy of the Highway Marker program.” First, you claim that the subject matter for a Marker is required to be “at least 50 years old”; second, you state the N.H. Department of Transportation (DoT) would not support a Marker at the proposed location; and third, you claim the proposal lacks broad community support.

After reviewing and considering your reasons stated for denying the proposal, it is our opinion that your decision was made in error. For the reasons outlined below, I am appealing to you on behalf of the 780 New Hampshire residents who petitioned for the Marker with support from multiple N.H. elected officials, a Professor of History at the United States Military Academy (USMA), my family, and the 3,000+ petitioners representing all 50 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and 42 different countries – to reconsider your position on this matter.

You write that your program requires subject matter be at least 50 years old to receive a Marker; however, a review of Markers approved by your office shows numerous approved and erected within your stated 50 year rule (Markers #177, 188, 231, 239). Further, no 50 year “requirement” is listed on your official website or in N.H. law. Lastly, you claim that 50 years is a “philosophical, nationally recognized period of time” by historians. This is untrue. It may be a rule of thumb used by your office and others, but of course it's just an arbitrary benchmark. This is why Dr. Robert M.S. McDonald, Professor of History at West Point, wrote a [letter of support](#) stating, “it is without a doubt a historic place as it was the location of an historically significant event.”

You lay the second reason for denying the request at the feet of the N.H. DoT, stating they “would not support locating a Marker at or near the proposed location based on the road shape and lack of road width or shoulder.” According to your official website, “sponsors should propose a Marker location, but the DoT selects the final location to insure safety and compliance with road regulations.” The formal request followed the guidance put forth by your office and I have not received any correspondence from DoT to discuss an alternative location than what was proposed. As highlighted in the proposal, every year thousands of residents visit the location on Rt. 112 where Maura’s car crashed before she disappeared without a trace. If DoT believes the proposed location is unsuitable, it is incumbent upon your office and the DoT to establish an appropriate place for N.H. residents and visitors to safely appreciate and commemorate the historical event that took place on February 9, 2004. If it is your opinion that the current proposed location is unsafe, and you are aware of the hundreds or thousands of annual visitors to that location, then by not approving the Marker and not establishing a safe location, you are putting the safety of N.H. residents and tourists who

visit your state every year in jeopardy. Approving the Marker would secure the safety of the thousands of N.H. residents and out of state visitors each year, and may even prevent another roadside tragedy at the same location.

Lastly, you cite a lack of broad community support as the final reason for your decision. I cannot speak for all residents of Haverhill; however, support by local and state residents is captured in the form of 780 N.H. petitioners in the formal October 16, 2020 request (your office requires 20 N.H. petitioners) and the hundreds of subsequent phone calls, voice mails, and emails of support sent to you and your office since the official submission, many of whom live in the area. Of course, historical Markers approved by your office are not without controversy, the so-called UFO Abduction of Betty and Barney Hill (Marker #224) being a prime example. Unlike the factually and scientifically dubious "alien abduction," no one is denying or questioning that Maura disappeared without a trace after crashing her car on Rt. 112 in Haverhill, N.H.

While I understand certain residents may find the disappearance of a missing girl and associated historical Marker in their community an imposition, the fact that Maura's disappearance is one of the most followed and well-known unsolved mysteries in the world has guaranteed that the site of her car crash on Rt. 112 will forever be a historical location visited regularly by an ever increasing number of residents and visitors for years to come. Perhaps because of this undeniable fact, a historical Marker is likely the best way to "bring communities together for a common cause," as you state in your letter.

I share your desire to protect the legitimacy of the Highway Marker program, which is why I strongly urge you to reconsider your denial of the request that unequivocally meets the official criteria for a N.H. Historic Highway Marker set forth by law. Without doing so, your stated reasons for denying the request remain inadequate and call into question the very legitimacy of your program that we both hope to protect.

Sincerely,



Julie Murray

CC Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Joseph d. Kenney, N.H. Executive Council, District 1
State Senator Robert Giuda, District 2
State Representative Rick Ladd, District 4
State Representative David Binford, District 15
State Representative Debra L. DeSimone, District 14
Commissioner Sarah Stewart, N.H. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
Commissioner Victoria Sheehan, N.H. Department of Transportation
Brigitte Codling, Haverhill Town Manager

