

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles F. Sams III
Director
National Parks Service
1849 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

October 16, 2023

We are writing to express our concerns about the recent acts of crime and vandalism at the historic San Antonio Missions, which the National Parks Service (NPS) oversees and maintains. As you know, the San Antonio Missions have existed for over 300 years and are at the heart of San Antonio's culture. They represent the interweaving of peoples that has shaped the heritage and identity of our city. We hope the NPS can continue to work with local organizations and government to ensure our Missions remain safe and open to the public.

The San Antonio Missions were established in the 18th century by Spaniards who built churches, farms, and ranches along the San Antonio River. Indigenous communities lived alongside the San Antonio River before the Spanish established their missions. Today, many San Antonians visit the Missions to understand their familial roots, heritage, and to learn about the significant impact of Spanish settlers on indigenous peoples. Now, San Antonio's unique blend of Spanish and indigenous cultures is represented throughout the city.

Mission San Antonio de Valero, now known as the Alamo, was founded in 1718 and has become a cultural icon throughout Texas and the United States. Four other missions - Mission Concepcion, Mission San Jose, Mission Espada, and Mission San Juan - dot the south side of San Antonio and provide beautiful green and cultural space to our constituents. Many families also visit the active church parishes that are co-located with each of the four Missions.

In 1978, Congress designated the San Antonio Missions as a National Historic Park and in 2015 the United Nations named the Missions as a World Heritage Site. These designations recognize the cultural importance of the Missions and reinforce the need to ensure the Missions remain safe. When Congress made the designation, NPS took on shared responsibility for maintaining the Missions and surrounding land with Las Misiones, the nonprofit charged by the Archdiocese of San Antonio to care for the churches. Under the agreement, the NPS protects and maintains the land and other structures while Las Misiones is solely responsible for the preservation of the four Mission churches. Despite these designations and shared responsibilities, the Missions have faced a recent uptick of vandalism in the past few years.

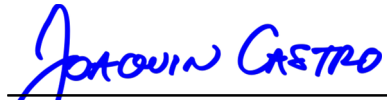
In 2022, vandals broke through the church doors at Mission San Juan and attempted to break into Mission Concepcion. The group of people reportedly carved names and dates into the doors of

Mission San Juan. Both the break-in and attempted break-in caused considerable damage to the two Missions. This July, vandals attempted to break into the Mission San Jose church and damaged the church's historic and iconic rose window. These centuries-old churches require special and expensive work to restore them to their original condition after acts of vandalism. The damage done to these historic churches leaves Las Misiones to pick up the bill for costly repairs.

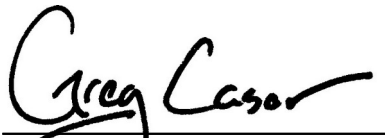
Community partners and local officials are also working together to protect the Missions and neighboring communities against ongoing vandalism. The complex jurisdictional boundaries around the park further complicate coordination efforts between local, state, and federal law enforcement officers to protect the park.

Last year, over 1 million people visited the San Antonio Missions to learn about the history of our community, which began as a frontier colonial outpost in 1719 and now is the 7th largest city in the United States. We are thankful for the work NPS has done to protect and promote our icons. We urge you to continue working closely with appropriate state and local partners to clarify jurisdictional boundaries and to create a plan to ensure our Missions remain safe and damage-free for many more years. We are worried that without proper protection and security, the San Antonio Missions may not survive another 300 years.

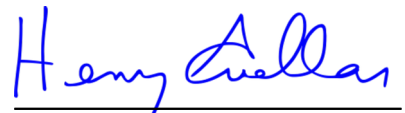
Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress