

**Testimony of
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President of the American Association of Museums,
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to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
in Support of Funding for
NEH, NEA and Historic Preservation Programs
April 27, 2012**

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to submit this testimony. My name is Ford Bell and I serve as President of the American Association of Museums (AAM). We urge your support for at least \$154.3 million each for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) – the amounts requested in the president’s FY 2013 budget proposal. We also urge your support for Historic Preservation efforts funded by the Subcommittee.

AAM is proud to represent the full range of our nation's museums – including aquariums, art museums, botanic gardens, children’s museums, culturally specific museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, science and technology centers, and zoos, among others – along with the professional staff and volunteers who work for and with museums.

AAM is proud to work on behalf of the 17,500 museums that employ 400,000 people, spend more than \$2 billion annually on K-12 educational programming, receive more than 90 million visits each year from primary and secondary school students, and contribute more than \$20 billion to local economies.

Museums are essential in our communities for many reasons:

- Museums are key education providers. Museums already offer educational programs in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies, in coordination with state and local curriculum standards. Museums also provide experiential learning opportunities, STEM education, youth training, job preparedness, and teacher training.
- Museums create jobs and support local economies. Museums serve as economic engines, bolster local infrastructure, and spur tourism. Both the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Governors Association agree that cultural assets such as museums are essential to attracting businesses, a skilled workforce, and local and international tourism. Museums pump more than \$20 billion into the American economy, creating many jobs.
- Museums address community challenges. Many museums offer programs tailored to seniors, veterans, children with special needs, persons with disabilities, and more, greatly

expanding their reach and impact. For example, some have programs designed specifically for children on the autism spectrum, some are teaching English as a Second Language, and some are serving as locations for supervised family visits through the family court system.

- Digitization and traveling exhibitions bring museum collections to underserved populations. Teachers, students, and researchers benefit when cultural institutions are able to increase access to trustworthy information through online collections and traveling exhibits. Most museums, however, need more help in digitizing collections.

Support from the NEH, NEA, and the Historic Preservation Fund plays a critical role in helping museums provide all of these essential community services.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1965. Grants are awarded to nonprofit educational institutions – including museums, colleges, universities, archives, and libraries – for educational programming and the care of collections. NEH provides annual grants to state humanities councils located in every state and U.S. territory. NEH supports museums as institutions of learning and exploration, and keepers of our cultural, historical, and scientific heritages.

Due to the impact of the economic downturn, many institutions and nonprofits around the country, including museums, are struggling to maintain continued access to high-quality programming and educational opportunities in the humanities.

In 2011, through Preservation & Access, one of NEH's national program divisions, more than 90 peer-reviewed, competitive grants totaling over \$4.1 million dollars were awarded to museums, historical societies and historic sites for a variety of projects to preserve and provide access to our nation's rich cultural heritage. Across all NEH divisions (including Preservation, Research, Education, Public Programs, Challenge Grants and Digital Humanities), these institutions received more than 160 awards totaling \$12.4 million in 2011.

Demand for humanities project support, as demonstrated by NEH grant application rates, far exceeds available funding. In FY 2009, NEH received 4,366 competitive grant applications representing more than \$402 million in requested funds, but was only able to fund 16.9% of these peer-reviewed project proposals.

Here are just two examples of how NEH funding is used to support museums' work in your communities:

- The Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence is using its \$300,000 FY 2011 Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant to install a sustainable environmental control system and make building improvements and security upgrades to preserve collections documenting the history of Rhode Island from pre-European contact to the present.
- The Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center in Haines, Alaska, is using its \$6,000 FY 2010 Preservation Assistant grant to support a general preservation assessment and the

purchase of preservation supplies and environmental monitoring equipment. The collection consists of 2,515 historical artifacts, 885 pieces of art, more than 6,000 photographs, 1,677 bound volumes, and 1,296 archival items dealing with the history of the Chilkat Valley and the town of Haines.

The National Endowment for the Arts provides direct federal funding to state arts agencies and to non-profit arts institutions including museums. Its mission is to make art accessible to all and to provide leadership in arts education. Established in 1965, NEA brings great art to every congressional district. Its grants to museums help them exhibit, preserve, and interpret visual material through exhibitions, residencies, publications, commissions, public art works, conservation, documentation, and public programs. Grants are awarded for specific projects and require at least a one-to-one match from the recipient. Most recently, a partnership between the NEA and Blue Star Families has created the Blue Star Museums program, in which more than 1,500 museums of all types across the nation provide free admission to military families from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

In 2011, NEA made 148 awards to museums, totaling over \$6 million. Many museums have reduced staff and budgets as a result of the recession, which has hit non-profit arts particularly hard. Despite the economic downturn, attendance is up, causing increased pressure to serve more people with fewer staff and smaller budgets.

Receiving a grant from the NEA confers prestige on supported projects, strengthening museums' ability to attract matching funds from other public and private funders. On average, each dollar awarded by the NEA leverages seven dollars from other sources. 40% of NEA's grant funds is distributed to state arts agencies for re-granting.

Here are two examples of how NEA funding is used to support museums' work in your communities:

- The Rhode Island School of Design (aka RISD) (on behalf of Museum of Art) in Providence is using its \$20,000 FY 2011 Access to Artistic Excellence grant to support the exhibition *Ahead of the Curve: Richard Brown and Contemporary British Art*, with accompanying catalogue and educational programs. The exhibition will feature more than 100 paintings, sculptures, and drawings by late 20th-century British artists such as David Hockney, Anthony Caro, Bridget Riley, Fiona Banner, Yinka Shonibare, Anish Kapoor, and Damian Hirst.
- The Seward Association for the Advancement of Marine Science (aka Alaska SeaLife Center) in Seward, Alaska is using its \$39,000 FY2012 Art Works I grant to support an expedition and planning of the exhibition, *GYRE*, that will engage artists and scientists in the global problem of marine debris. In partnership with the Anchorage Museum, a group of artists including Pam Longobardi, Mark Dion, Alexis Rockman, Andrew Hughes, and Sonya Kelliher-Combs will accompany a team of scientists aboard the ship R/V Norseman in a research expedition to expose artists to the impact of marine debris on various ecosystems.

Historic Preservation

In addition to the NEH and NEA, we urge you to fund important historic preservation programs under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction providing at least \$47 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and \$9 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). We also urge you to restore funding of \$25 million for Save America's Treasures and \$4.6 million for Preserve America, which have not been funded for the past two fiscal years.

The 2005 Heritage Health Index of archives, libraries, historical societies, and museums concluded that immediate action is needed to prevent the loss of 190 million artifacts that are in need of conservation treatment.

- 59% have collections damaged by light.
- 56% have insufficient security to protect their collections.
- 80% do not have an emergency plan that includes collections.
- 71% need additional training and expertise for staff caring for collections.
- Only 13% have access to endowment funds for preservation.

Historic preservation programs matter now more than ever – not only because they protect our national heritage, but because they serve as economic development engines and job creators in the thousands of communities they serve. For example, Save America's Treasures alone has been responsible for supporting more than 16,000 jobs since it was created just ten years ago. A 2009 report to Congress by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation found that Preserve America is addressing many state, local, and regional heritage tourism needs with a relatively small federal investment.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.