



**Testimony of
Don Wildman, Host, Travel Channel's *Mysteries at the Museum*
On behalf of the American Alliance of Museums (www.aam-us.org)
To the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
March 28, 2014**

Chairman Kingston, Ranking Member DeLauro and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Don Wildman, and for six highly rated seasons, I've had the extreme honor of hosting a television show, *Mysteries at the Museum* (Thursday nights on the Travel Channel), which tells the stories behind artifacts in museum collections. My testimony today is presented on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums, the largest organization of museums and museum professionals in the world, and we are respectfully asking the Subcommittee to provide \$38.6 million for the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), its fully-authorized amount, in fiscal year 2015.

Museums are among our nation's most popular, most trusted and most beloved institutions. There are approximately 850 million visits to American museums each year, more than the attendance for all major league sporting events and theme parks combined. Museums also spend over \$2 billion on educational programming, and a total of \$21 billion in their local economies. Clearly museums are economic engines and job creators.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports the museum field, and OMS awards grants to help museums digitize, enhance and preserve their collections; provide teacher training; and create innovative, cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary programs and exhibits for schools and the public.

It's no surprise that the appropriations bill that funds education supports this agency, because museums are indeed key education providers. They design exhibitions, educational programs, classroom kits, and online resources in coordination with state, local and common core curriculum standards in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies. Museums also offer experiential learning opportunities, STEM education, mentoring, and job preparedness.



Whatever education looks like in the future, one component will certainly be the development of a core set of skills: critical thinking; the ability to synthesize information; and the ability to innovate, to be creative and to collaborate. Museums are uniquely situated to help learners develop these core skills.

In late 2010, legislation to reauthorize IMLS for five years was enacted (by voice vote in the House and by unanimous consent in the Senate). The bipartisan reauthorization included several provisions proposed by the museum field, including enhanced support for conservation and preservation, emergency preparedness and response and statewide capacity building. The reauthorization also specifically supports efforts at the state level to leverage museum resources, including statewide needs assessments and the development of state plans to improve and maximize museum services throughout the state. The bill (now Public Law 111-340) authorized \$38.6 million for the IMLS Office of Museum Services to meet the growing demand for museum programs and services. The fiscal year 2014 appropriation of \$30,131,000 represents a nearly 15% decrease from the fiscal year 2010 appropriation of \$35,212,000.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the importance of the IMLS Office of Museum Services is to highlight just a few of the grants awarded in 2013 to museums in states represented by subcommittee members:

Minority Job Training— The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (Cincinnati, OH) was awarded \$150,000 to recruit talented graduates from colleges and universities across the country, with a focus on those from Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The graduates will serve as apprentices and receive on-the-job training and classroom instruction over two years so as to develop the expertise and skills needed to strengthen African American museums and institutions.

Environmental Science— The Calvert Marine Museum Society (Solomons, MD) was awarded \$142,500 to develop and install an exhibit on the ecosystem of the Patuxent River and Chesapeake Bay. They are partnering with local schools and community groups to facilitate lifelong learning of scientific concepts and environmental stewardship.



Collections Care— The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (Birmingham, AL) was awarded \$74,277 to safeguard its collections to ensure that they will be available for use by current and future students, the general public, researchers and staff.

STEM Education— The University of Alabama/Alabama Museum of Natural History (Tuscaloosa, AL) was awarded \$99,998 to create the Discovery Learning Lab to give middle and high school-aged students access to “geek” mentors who will guide them in explorations of digital technologies not readily available at home or school in low-income areas. This program exposes teens to STEM disciplines, skills, activities, and software at the lab and in a cyberspace environment.

Public Access— The Historic Hudson Valley (Pocantico Hills, NY) was awarded \$149,837 to create an online database of its collections for the wider public to use.

Scientific Literacy—The Great Lakes Science Center (Cleveland, OH) was awarded \$80,579 for an exhibit focusing on Northeast Ohio issues, as part of its Great Lakes Story gallery. The interactive exhibit will feature touch-screen monitors, game-format activities, interviews with experts and an interactive map to provide informal STEM education rooted in real-world scientific challenges relevant to the region.

Native American History— The Ohio Historical Society (Columbus, OH) was awarded \$24,941 to implement The Oklahoma & Ohio Exchange, a collaborative project with the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Ohio K-12 teachers and Oklahoma K-12 teachers. The project focuses on the subject of “Indian Removal,” a federal policy that relocated Native American tribes living east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river, which left little historical record and makes teaching and learning about both Native American history and contemporary Native American life in Ohio difficult.

Mobile Science Classroom—The Discovery Center at Murfree Spring (Murfreesboro, TN) was awarded \$103,849 to convert a school bus into a mobile science classroom for elementary school students.

Digitization— The Country Music Hall of Fame (Nashville, TN) was awarded \$150,000 for a digitization initiative to preserve and increase access to the museum’s unparalleled collection.



Collections Stewardship—The University Museum, University of Arkansas (Fayetteville, AR) was awarded \$31,464 to improve its zoology collection and make it more accessible to researchers.

Endangered Species—Zoo Atlanta (Atlanta, GA) was awarded \$486,580 to create a national program to aid in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease in endangered species.

Traveling Exhibitions—Artspace (New Haven, CT) was awarded \$99,225 to create a small self-contained gallery unit for traveling exhibitions. The museum will schedule six onsite and six travelling exhibitions, along with free artist and curator talks, demonstrations and workshops.

Science Literacy/College Preparedness—The Peabody Museum of Natural History (New Haven, CT) was awarded \$149,585 to present a free after-school program focused on science literacy, college preparation and career awareness to a diverse group of high school students from the New Haven community who are traditionally underrepresented in the sciences.

Youth Literacy—The Connecticut Children's Museum (New Haven, CT) was awarded \$149,475 to address youth literacy and disparities in access to out-of-school family learning.

Collections Care/Tourism—The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center (Hartford, CT) was awarded \$150,000 to preserve and protect the collections of this 1871 historic house, an international heritage tourism site.

Teacher Training—The Mystic Seaport Museum (Mystic, CT) was awarded \$80,343 for cataloging and digitizing 4,950 items to support an online learning project for students and to provide teacher training.

I am aware that this subcommittee wants to ensure that its investments in federal grant programs have measurable and significant impact. I believe that the grants listed above demonstrate the value of investing in museums as a means of investing in our communities. Further, it should be noted that each time a federal grant is awarded, additional local and private funds are also leveraged. Two-thirds of IMLS grantees report that their Museums for America grant had positioned the museum to receive additional private funding.



Even the most ardent deficit hawks view the IMLS grant-making process as a model for the nation. Each grant is selected through a rigorous, peer-reviewed process. And due to the large number of grant applications and the limited funds available, many highly-rated grant proposals go unfunded each year.

- Only 28% of Museums for America/Conservation Project Support project proposals were funded;
- Only 15% of National Leadership project proposals were funded;
- Only 15% of Sparks Ignition Grants for Museums project proposals were funded;
- Only 46% of Native American/Hawaiian Museum Services project proposals were funded; and
- Only 31% of African American History and Culture project proposals were funded.

On a final and personal note, the interviews I conduct with museum professionals for my television show have confirmed for me what I've known since I was a kid—that museums are cool, *really* cool. If there's one thing Americans young and old love, it's a good story about America and that's what museums have to offer.

American museums do this job and they do it extremely well. They collect the stories by preserving and curating the objects—documents, inventions, clothing, paintings, sculptures and skeletons—which explain who we've been, who we are and how we survive.

I was raised outside of Philadelphia. Without museums, I'd have never walked through the left ventricle of the super-sized heart in the Ben Franklin Institute. But for the Academy of Natural Sciences, I'd have never understood the difference between a stegosaurus and a triceratops. I wouldn't have had that first encounter with Vincent van Gogh at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It's impossible to imagine my childhood without museums or to imagine my adulthood. They're our lifeline to the past—and an inspiration for the future.

We hope you'll support our cause, and provide at least \$38.6 million in fiscal year 2015 for the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), its fully-authorized amount.