

**Testimony of Dr. Ford W. Bell,
President of the American Alliance of Museums,
www.aam-us.org
to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies
in support of the IMLS Office of Museum Services
May 6, 2013**

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Moran, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Ford Bell and I serve as President of the American Alliance of Museums. I also submit this testimony on behalf of the larger museum community – including the American Association for State and Local History, the Association of Art Museum Directors, the Association of Science-Technology Centers, the Association of Science Museum Directors, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Association of Children’s Museums, the American Public Gardens Association, and Heritage Preservation – to request that the Subcommittee make a renewed investment in museums in Fiscal Year(FY) 2014. We urge you to fully fund the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) at its authorized level of \$38.6 million.

The Alliance 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. We are honored to work on behalf of the country’s 17,500 museums that employ 400,000 people and that annually spend more than \$2 billion on educational programming, deliver 18 million instructional hours to students and teachers, and directly contribute \$21 billion to their local economies.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports the nation’s museums, 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. The 2012-2016 IMLS Strategic Plan lists clear priorities: placing the learner at the center of the museum experience, promoting museums as strong community anchors, supporting museum stewardship of their collections, advising the President and Congress on how to sustain and increase public access to information and ideas, and serving as a model independent federal agency maximizing value for the American public. IMLS is indeed a model federal agency.

In late 2010, a bill to reauthorize IMLS for five years was enacted (by voice vote in the House and 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 final, post-sequestration, FY 2013 funding level for OMS of \$29,245,034 represents a nearly 17 percent cut from the FY 2010 appropriation of \$35,212,000. However, President Obama's FY 2014 budget proposes to partially restore these cuts by requesting \$32,923,270 for the Office of Museum Services. We strongly applaud the increased request, especially under current budgetary constraints.

To be clear, museums are essential in our communities for many reasons:

- **Museums are 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, youth training, and job preparedness. They reach beyond the scope of instructional programming for schoolchildren by also providing critical teacher training. There is a growing consensus that whatever the new educational era looks like, it will focus on the development of a core set of skills: critical thinking, the ability to synthesize information, the ability to innovate, creativity, and collaboration. Museums are uniquely situated to help learners develop these core skills.
- **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 have noted that cultural assets such as museums are essential to attracting businesses, a skilled workforce, and local and international tourism.
- **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 working directly with Alzheimer's patients. Many museums facilitate job training programs, provide vegetable gardens for low-income communities, or serve as locations for supervised visits through the family court system. In 2012, more than 1,800 museums participated in the Blue Star Museums initiative, offering free admission to all active duty and reserve military personnel and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day.
- **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.

Grants to museums are highly competitive and decided through a rigorous, peer-reviewed process. Even the most ardent deficit hawks view the IMLS grant-making process as a model for the nation. It would take approximately \$129 million to fund all the grant applications that IMLS received from museums in 2012. But given the significant budget cuts, many highly-rated grant applications go unfunded each year:

- Only 31% of Museums for America/Conservation Project Support projects were funded;
- Only 19% of National Leadership/21st Century Museum Professionals/Sparks Ignition Grants for Museums/Connecting to Collections Implementation projects were funded;
- Only 61% of Native American/Hawaiian Museum Services projects were funded; and
- Only 33% of African American History and Culture projects were funded.

It should be noted that each time a museum grant is awarded, additional local and private funds are also leveraged. In addition to the required dollar-for-dollar match required of museums, grants often spur additional giving by private foundations and individual donors. A recent IMLS study found that 67% of museums that received Museums for America grants reported that their IMLS grant had positioned the museum to receive additional private funding.

Here are just a few examples of how Office of Museum Services funding is used:

- The Alliance-accredited National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa will use its \$148,351 Museums for America grant awarded in 2011 to capture the personal stories and family sagas of Czech and Slovak Cold War émigrés and recent (post-Velvet Revolution) Czech and Slovak immigrants to America. The project involves incorporating informational content and video clips into a new permanent exhibition. Other aspects of the project include design of a traveling exhibit, a conference, and the publication of an issue of the museum's journal, *Slovo*, which uses oral history content. This week, the museum will also receive IMLS' National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the country's highest honor for museums and libraries, for its essential role in rebuilding a Cedar Rapids neighborhood following devastating floods in 2008.
- The Alliance-accredited Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas will use its \$150,000 Conservation Project Support grant awarded in 2012 to continue restoration work on *Personnages Oiseaux*, the 26 x 52 foot glass-and-marble mosaic façade created and installed by Joan Miró. The work is touted as "an icon for the museum, the university, the City of Wichita, and the State of Kansas."
- The Prince George's African American Museum & Cultural Center in North Brentwood, Maryland will use its \$147,308 African American History and Culture grant to support a museum curriculum and certification program. This grant, awarded in 2012, will increase professional knowledge and skills for community college students. The museum will work in partnership with the Workforce Development Program at Prince George's Community College

to create a curriculum model to share with other community colleges. The certification program is a training course revolving around a museum studies internship project highlighting African American history. The project will offer practical entry-level training experience to PGCC students interested in pursuing careers in museums.

- The Birmingham Zoo in Birmingham, Alabama will use its \$133,000 Museums for America grant, awarded in 2012, to support its Africa Zoo School program, which will aim to serve 1,200 students over two years. In partnership with Birmingham City Schools, the project will target all seventh-grade students within the city. Participating students, most attending low-performing schools, will attend a week-long “Zoo School” session, where they will be introduced to the Trails of Africa exhibit and will work through a related curriculum. The exhibit is the basis of an interdisciplinary experience to teach about the crisis of the elephant species' survival in Africa, the cultures of people in Africa, and the scientific and engineering research involved in sustaining these populations. Students will develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which they can adapt to the classroom and home.

In closing, I would like to share with you for the record a recent letter to the Subcommittee requesting funding for OMS signed by 24 of your Senate colleagues, including Subcommittee members Senator Durbin, Senator Reed, and Senator Shaheen. Thank you once again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2013

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services and Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services and Education
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Moran:

We are writing to thank you for your support for the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and to urge the Subcommittee to support robust funding for OMS in the FY 2014 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill. The Office of Museum Services is currently authorized to receive \$38.6 million annually.

The demand for museum services is greater than ever. At a time when school resources are strained and many families cannot afford to travel or make ends meet, museums are working overtime to fill the gaps – providing more than 18 million instructional hours to schoolchildren, bringing art and cultural heritage, dynamic exhibitions and living specimens into local communities, partnering with other nonprofits to encourage national service and volunteerism, and offering free or reduced admission. Museums are part of a robust nonprofit community working to address a wide range of our nation's greatest challenges, from conducting medical research to hosting supervised visits for the family court system, and from creating energy efficient public buildings to collecting food for needy families.

Unfortunately, museums are struggling significantly in these difficult economic times. They are being forced to cut back on hours, educational programming, community services and jobs. And according to the 2005 *Heritage Health Index*, at least 190 million artifacts are at risk, suffering from light damage and harmful and insecure storage conditions. Many museums also rely heavily on philanthropic donations to keep admission rates low and provide new exhibitions for their communities.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary federal agency that serves the nation's more than 17,500 museums, and its Office of Museum Services' funding has decreased in recent years. Although the agency has been successful in creating and supporting advancements in areas such as technology, lifelong community learning and conservation and preservation efforts, only a small fraction of the nation's museums are currently being reached, and many highly rated grant applications go unfunded each year.

In 2010, the Institute of Museum and Library Services was unanimously reauthorized by both the House and Senate. The agency is highly accountable, and its competitive, peer-reviewed grants serve every state. The reauthorization contained several provisions to further support museums, particularly at the state level, but much of the recently authorized activities cannot be accomplished without sustained funding.

We urge the Subcommittee to support robust funding for the IMLS Office of Museum Services for FY14 to support the important work museums are doing in our communities. This vital funding will aid museums of all types – aquariums, arboretums, archaeological museums, art museums, botanical gardens, children's museums, culturally specific museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, zoological parks, and other types of museums – and enable them to continue serving our schools and communities and preserving our cultural heritage for future generations.

Again, we appreciate the Subcommittee's prior support for OMS and request this investment to strengthen and sustain the work of our nation's museums.

Sincerely,



Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senate



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate



Jack Reed
United States Senate



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate



Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senate



Tim Johnson
United States Senate



Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senate



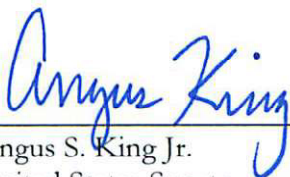
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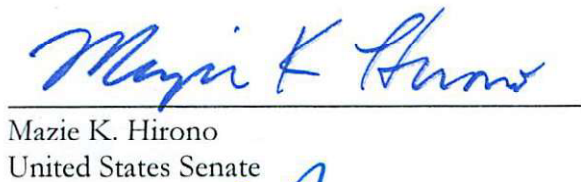
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