



Testimony of Ford W. Bell, DVM, President, American Alliance of Museums

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**to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
in Support of Funding for
NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution, and Historic Preservation Programs
April 15, 2015**

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Udall, 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 Alliance of Museums (AAM). We urge your support for at least \$155 million each in fiscal year 2016 (FY 2016) for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), as well as \$935.8 million for the Smithsonian Institution. We also request your support for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), including at least \$50 million for State Historic Preservation Offices, \$15 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, \$32.5 million to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement, and restored funding for the Save America's Treasures and Preserve America programs.

Before detailing these funding priorities for the museum field, I want to express my deepest appreciation for the difficult position in which the Subcommittee finds itself, given inadequate 302(b) allocations in recent years. Like many museums, the Subcommittee will need to make many difficult decisions, each of which comes with a unique set of consequences. In this context, however, we would posit that each of our priorities outlined below is a vital investment that will both protect our nation's cultural treasures and provide a tremendous benefit to the overall economy.

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 nation's museums, which employ 400,000 people, invest more than \$2 billion annually on educational programs, receive more than 55 million visits each year from primary and secondary school students, and directly contribute \$21 billion to their 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 a range of programs geared toward homeschooling families. 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, creativity, and collaboration. We believe museums are uniquely situated to help learners develop these core skills, and this is borne out by evidence. According to a recent University of Arkansas study, students who attended just a half-day field trip to an art museum experienced an increase in critical thinking skills, historical empathy and tolerance. For students from rural or high-poverty regions, the increase was even more significant.

- **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 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 while others are addressing veterans' post-war trauma or providing youth job training opportunities.
- **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.

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 supports museums as institutions of learning and exploration, and as keepers of our cultural, historical, and scientific heritages.

In 2014, through Preservation & Access, one of NEH's national program divisions, 67 peer-reviewed, competitive grants totaling over \$4.8 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 and Access, Research, Education, Public Programs, Challenge Grants and Digital Humanities), these institutions received 128 awards totaling over \$13.5 million. Demand for humanities project support, as demonstrated by NEH grant application rates, far exceeds available funding. In FY 2014, NEH received 4,281 competitive grant applications representing more than \$431 million in requested funds, but was only able to fund 15.2 percent of these peer-reviewed project proposals.

NEH also provides annual grants to state humanities councils located in every state and U.S. territory. In 2014, 55 state councils supported 2,402 events in museums, reaching a total audience of more than 5.8 million people.

Here are just two examples of how NEH funding supports museums' work in your communities:

- In 2013, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History received \$274,390 to select, digitize, and make available 100,000 pages of Mississippi newspapers published between 1836 and 1922. These primary sources offer vital insight into state and national heritage.

- Historic London Town in Edgewater, Maryland received \$177,814 in 2013 to support two one-week workshops for eighty school teachers on the development of slavery in the Chesapeake Bay region, with lessons from local museums on teaching this difficult issue.

The National Endowment for the Arts makes art accessible to all and provides leadership in arts education. Established in 1965, NEA supports great art in 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, services to the field, and public programs.

In 2014, more than 2,200 museums participated as Blue Star Museums—a partnership between NEA, Blue Star Families, and the Department of Defense—to offer free admission to all active duty and reserve personnel and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day. This particular effort served over 700,000 people, while many other museums offer military discounts or free admission throughout the year.

In 2014, NEA made more than 140 direct awards to museums, totaling over \$5.4 million. Forty percent of NEA’s grant funds are distributed to state arts agencies for re-granting, and many museums participate at this level as well.

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 nine dollars from other sources.

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

- Alaska’s Chilkat Indian Village received a \$50,000 grant to work with museum professionals to create an exhibit that will convey the ancestral, cultural, and artistic history of the Chilkat people. The exhibition will help foster community identity, serving the village, the neighboring community of Haines, and national and international visitors.
- The International Folk Art Foundation in Santa Fe, New Mexico received \$50,000 to support its Imagining Home Project. Traditional artists from local immigrant communities and abroad display work in the museum’s Gallery of Conscience on the themes of leaving home, and the challenges and opportunities presented by life in a new country.

In addition to these direct grants, NEA’s Arts and Artifacts Indemnity program also allows museums to apply for federal indemnity on major exhibitions, saving them roughly \$30 million in insurance costs every year and making many more exhibitions available to the public—all at virtually no cost to the taxpayer. We were glad last year to work with the Association of Art Museum Directors and with the Subcommittee to increase the indemnity limits as part of Public Law 113-235, and we remain extremely grateful for the Subcommittee’s work on this matter.

The Smithsonian Institution comprises some of the most visited museums in the world, including the National Museum of American History, the National Air and Space Museum, and the National Museum of Natural History. The Smithsonian reaches visitors and learners of all ages, in the nation’s capital and across the country, with innovative exhibits and programs. Its 20 museums—

including the National Zoo—attract 30 million visits every year, and their content and curricula are used by teachers all over the country.

The president's FY2016 budget request of \$935.8 million includes critical funding for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which will tell an essential part of American history. Additional funding for collections care, ground-breaking research, facilities maintenance, and technology upgrades will allow the Smithsonian to care for the nation's treasures and increase access for all. We enthusiastically support this robust funding proposal for the Smithsonian Institution. However, we have serious concerns about the president's proposed STEM consolidation plan, which would eliminate or cut important programs that support museums at the National Institutes of Health, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) is the funding source of preservation awards to states, tribes, local governments, and nonprofits. State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs and THPOs) carry out the historic preservation work of the federal government on state and tribal lands. These duties include making nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, reviewing impacts of federal projects, providing assistance to developers seeking a rehabilitation tax credit, working with local preservation commissions, and conducting preservation education and planning. This federal-state-local foundation of America's historic preservation program was established by the National Historic Preservation Act. We urge you to provide \$50 million for SHPOs and \$15 million for THPOs through the Historic Preservation Fund. 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 in recent years.

Also in the context of the Historic Preservation Fund, we support the proposed Civil Rights Initiative, including \$30 million for competitive historic preservation grants to preserve the stories and sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement as well as \$2.5 million to help Historically Black Colleges and Universities conduct similar documentation and interpretation.

The 2005 Heritage Health Index of archives, libraries, historical societies, and museums concluded that action is needed to prevent the loss of 190 million artifacts that require 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; and only 13% have access to endowment funds for preservation.

Historic preservation programs matter now more than ever—not only because they are essential to protecting our national heritage, but because they serve as economic development engines and job creators. Funds invested in building rehabilitation have been shown to create more jobs and retail activity than those spent on new construction.

I want to once more acknowledge the difficult choices that the Subcommittee faces. I hope that my testimony has made it clear why these priorities are of critical importance to the nation and will provide a worthwhile return on investment to the American taxpayer. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.