



5-Minute Oral Testimony
Testimony of Michael A. Mares, PhD
Director, Sam Noble Museum, University of Oklahoma
on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums (www.aam-us.org)
to the House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
in support of the IMLS Office of Museum Services
April 26, 2018

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Michael Mares and I am Director of the Sam Noble Museum at the University of Oklahoma.

I'm here on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) which represents US museums. I'm here to request the Subcommittee provide the Office of Museum Services (OMS) within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with at least \$38.6 million, its most recent authorized level.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports the nation's museums. This small program is a vital investment in protecting our nation's cultural treasures, educating students and lifelong learners, and bolstering local economies. Grants help museums create innovative programs and exhibits for schools and the public, and help museums digitize and preserve their collections. The IMLS grant-making process is rigorous and competitive and these grants leverage local funding.

Museums are economic engines and job creators: U.S. museums support more than 726,000 jobs and pump \$50 billion annually into the economy. Their economic activity generates more than \$12 billion in tax revenue, one-third of it going to state and local governments. The financial impact museums have on Oklahoma's economy is \$405 million each year, including 6,400 jobs. For New York State it's a \$5.37 billion impact supporting 62,000 jobs. This impact is not limited to cities: more than 25% of museums are in rural areas.

Museums are key education providers that spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities. A typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to K-12 students, and museums receive 55 million visits each year from students in school groups. Museums help teach state and local curricula and have long served as a vital resource to homeschoolers.

I am proud that my museum has benefitted from OMS grants:

The museum was founded by the Territorial Legislature in 1899, 4 years after the last Land Run. Its collections are a record of life over a billion years of time. In 1981 it was struggling to survive, but many believed that Oklahoma deserved better, including IMLS, which helped the museum with funding in critical ways over 4 decades. This support helped sustain the drive for a new museum that became a reality in 2000. In 2003, the museum was presented the national award for conservation for saving the heritage of the State of Oklahoma.

With a recent award of \$123,000, the museum developed traveling Discovery Kits for students and teachers across cities and rural parts of Oklahoma. All curricula are aligned with educational standards and feature age-specialized content focusing on geologic history, life, and cultural sciences. The Discovery Kits and all content are available to the public at no cost. This project addresses the lack of high-quality STEM curricula available in Oklahoma. At its completion, there will be a tested body of curricula that will increase availability and accessibility of exceptional science resources for all Oklahoma students.

Another recent OMS grant of \$129,000 allowed the museum to preserve a critical frozen tissue DNA collection. Similarly, last year the Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, Connecticut, received a \$157,000 OMS grant to improve storage conditions and access to more than 15,000 bird specimens. These projects facilitate the use of collections in research and teaching worldwide, and provide educational experiences for undergraduates, K-12 teachers and students through training and outreach.

Being recognized with an IMLS National Medal for Museum Service in 2014, the nation's highest award for museums, has been a great honor for the Sam Noble Museum and for me as director. It opened doors for the museum nationally and internationally. In 2015, the museum was inducted into the Club of Excellence by the European Heritage Association. And, in 2017, our Native American youth language program designed to save Native languages, was named THE top educational program by the University Museums and Collections association.

I am grateful for the \$34.7 million in funding for OMS in FY 2018. But I note that it's well shy of the roughly \$165 million that museums request annually from the agency through highly-rated grant applications.

In closing, I highlight a recent national poll showing 95% of voters would approve of lawmakers who acted to support museums and 96% want federal funding for museums to be maintained or increased. People love museums.

I also would like to share with you for the record a bipartisan letter to the Subcommittee—supporting funding for OMS—signed by 183 of your House colleagues.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.