



**Testimony of Laura L. Lott  
President and CEO, American Alliance of Museums  
to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
in support of the IMLS Office of Museum Services  
May 31, 2018**

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Laura Lott and I serve as President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). I respectfully request that the subcommittee make a renewed investment in museums in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. I urge you to 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. I want to express gratitude for the \$34.7 million in funding for OMS in FY 2018. This small program is a vital investment in protecting our nation’s cultural treasures, educating students and lifelong learners, and bolstering local economies around the country.

Representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, institutions—including aquariums, art museums, botanic gardens, children’s museums, cultural museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, science and technology centers, and zoos—and corporate partners serving the museum field, the Alliance stands for the broad scope of the museum community.

Museums are economic engines and job creators: According to *Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report*, U.S. museums support more than 726,000 jobs and contribute \$50 billion to the U.S. economy per year. The economic activity of museums generates more than \$12 billion in tax revenue, one-third of it going to state and local governments. For example, the total financial impact that museums have on the economy in Missouri is \$852 million, including 13,653 jobs. For Washington it is a \$1.01 billion impact supporting 14,145 jobs. This impact is not limited to cities: more than 25% of museums are in rural areas.

Museums spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities; the typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to K-12 students, and museums receive approximately 55 million visits each year from students in school groups. Children who visited a museum during kindergarten had higher achievement scores in reading, math and science in third grade than children who did not, including children most at risk for delays in achievement. Also, students who attended 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 help teach the state and local curriculum in subjects ranging from art and science to history, civics, and government. Museums have long served as a vital resource to homeschool learners. For the approximately 1.8 million students who are homeschooled—a population that has increased by 60% in the past decade—museums are quite literally the classroom. It is not surprising that in a 2017 public opinion survey, 97% of

respondents agreed that museums were educational assets in their communities. The results were statistically identical regardless of political persuasion or community size.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports museums, and OMS awards grants in every state to help museums digitize, enhance and preserve collections; provide teacher professional development; and create innovative, cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary programs and exhibits for schools and the public. The FY 2018 appropriation of \$34.7 million, while a most welcome funding increase, still falls below its recent high of \$35.2 million in FY 2010. We applaud the 40 bipartisan Senators who wrote to you in support of FY 2019 OMS funding.

Here are just two examples of how IMLS funding was used in 2017 to support museums' work in your communities:

- **The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri**, received a \$384,532 Museums for America grant to research and implement a rich array of public offerings through the Deaf Culture Project, as well as to hire a Coordinator for the Deaf Culture Program. "One of the core principles of the Nelson-Atkins strategic plan is attracting all our constituents with focused and effective communications and outreach," said Julián Zugazagoitia, Menefee D. and Mary Louise Blackwell CEO & Director of the Nelson-Atkins in a recent press release. "Engaging our visitors who are Deaf or hard of hearing will deepen and broaden our mission, building relationships and expanding involvement."

The Nelson-Atkins will create a suite of interrelated activities designed to build engagement and learning among visitors who are Deaf, empowering them to participate in the museum's collections and programs. "We are excited to have the opportunity to collaborate with community stakeholders and partner organizations such as the Museum of Deaf History, Arts and Culture, The Whole Person, and the Kansas School for the Deaf," said Christine Boutros, Manager, Community & Access Programs. "This is a project that will not only increase access to the collection for Deaf and hard of hearing populations in Kansas City, but will also build general audience understanding and appreciation for Deaf culture, American Sign Language, and the diversity of experiences and identities of people who are Deaf and hard of hearing."

This program builds on a 2015 initiative, in which the Nelson-Atkins formed an Advisory Committee for Accessibility to work with people with disabilities. Other programs arising from this committee include Low Sensory Mornings and Relating to Art, and current tactile tours have been revamped. The Deaf Culture Project will be developed with Deaf and hard of hearing communities across greater Kansas City and will provide a model for museums around the country. Over the coming months, the museum will work to identify and understand what programs, approaches, and strategies would have the greatest and most positive impact. Focus groups will discuss opportunities, challenges, and benefits that will inform project planning and development.

- **The Children's Museum of Tacoma, Washington**, received a \$499,994 Museums for America award to develop and pilot programs and fabricate exhibits for a satellite location on Joint Base Lewis-McChord. "Play is on Base" will strengthen the museum's position as a community anchor by increasing its capacity to engage and serve the

region's military families. The museum and the military base will collaborate closely, engage additional community organizations, and work with the intended audience to create exhibits and programs tailored to meet the unique needs of military families, especially those whose children have special needs. Project activities also will include professional development for staff and volunteers to build the knowledge and strategies needed to work with the target audiences. An external evaluator will develop a comprehensive evaluation plan and related tools to ensure exhibits and programs are meeting organizational goals as well as audience needs. The project will contribute to the creation of a model for partnerships between children's museums and military installations across the country.

In addition to these examples, I want to share with you an excerpt from the powerful live public witness testimony provided on April 26, 2018 to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies by Dr. Michael A. Mares, Director of the **Sam Noble Museum of Natural History at the University of Oklahoma**:

“I am proud that my museum has benefitted from OMS grants: The museum was founded by the Territorial Legislature in 1899, four years after the last Land Run. The Legislature directed the museum to develop collections, interpret Oklahoma’s natural and cultural heritage, and bring the world to Oklahoma. The collections grew rapidly: dinosaurs, fossils, Native American artifacts, natural history specimens—a record of life over a billion years of time.

In 1981 the museum was struggling to survive, but there were people who believed that Oklahoma deserved better, including IMLS, which helped the museum with funding for personnel, collections, and programs over 4 decades. This support helped sustain the drive for a new museum that became a reality in 2000. In 2003, the museum was awarded the national award for conservation for saving the heritage of the State of Oklahoma.

With a recent award of \$123,132, 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 K-12 content focusing on geologic, life and cultural sciences relevant to the state. The kits and curriculum feature museum teaching collections and specimens. Kits contain multimedia resources to engage students with local scientists including video of museum scientists in the field, scientific investigations and videos from inside the collections. In addition, all content has been digitized and made available to the public at no cost. Through this project, the museum addresses the lack of high-quality STEM curricula and natural history science available in Oklahoma. At the completion of the project, the museum will have produced a tested body of curricula relevant to Oklahoma’s K-12 teachers that will increase availability and accessibility of exceptional science resources for all students. Our programs are changing the lives of Oklahoma’s young people—children who would have had few opportunities to do something unique without the museum’s programs.

A recent OMS grant of \$128,863 allowed the museum to improve the stewardship and long-term preservation of its frozen tissue collection—a collection that was vulnerable to catastrophic loss in a disaster prone region. The project will facilitate the use of genetic

resources 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 honor for museums, has been a great honor for the Sam Noble Museum and for me as director. It has 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 language program, which is saving Native languages, was selected as the outstanding international educational program by the University Museums and Collections association."

IMLS grants to museums are highly competitive and decided through a rigorous peer-review process. Even the most ardent deficit hawks ought to view the IMLS grant-making process as a model for the nation. It should be noted that each time a museum grant is awarded, additional local and private funds are also leveraged. In addition to the dollar-for-dollar match generally required of museums, grants often spur more giving by private foundations and individual donors. Two-thirds of Museums for America grantees report that their grant encouraged additional private funding. In FY 2017, the OMS received 962 applications requesting nearly \$165 million, but current funding (\$31.7 in FY 2017) has allowed the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly-rated grant applications it receives.

Please consider this request in the context of the essential role that museums play in our nation, as well as their immense economic and educational impact. In closing, I highlight 2017 national public opinion polling that shows that 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. If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Laura L. Lott  
llott@aam-us.org  
(202) 289-1818