



**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**  
**June 3, 2019**

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity 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) 2020. I urge you to provide the Office of Museum Services (OMS) within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with \$42.7 million, the \$8 million increase recently approved by the House Appropriations Committee. 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. Museums help teach the state and local curricula, tailoring their programs in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies. Students who attend a field trip to an art museum experience an increase in critical thinking skills, historical empathy, and tolerance. For students from rural or high-poverty regions, the increase is even more significant. Children who visited a museum during kindergarten had higher achievement scores in reading, mathematics, and science in third grade than children who did not. Children who are most at risk for deficits and delays in achievement also see this benefit. 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 2019 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 41 bipartisan Senators who wrote to you in support of FY 2020 OMS funding.

Here are just two examples of how IMLS funding was used in 2018 to support museums' work in your communities:

- **The University of Missouri in Saint Louis, Missouri** received a \$49,979 National Leadership Grant to support a leadership team from the university to partner with nine cultural heritage organizations, including museums, to prototype a collaborative model for internships that offers peer support and fosters mentorship to students from faculty and site coordinators. The project team will bring students, faculty and site supervisors together for a 4-5 day project team kick-off meeting to design a micro-internship program allowing diverse students to participate in 2-3 week fully-paid internships at heritage sites across the U.S. For two to three weeks, six to ten students will work in pairs at pre-selected internship sites with the support of mentors. The project activities will result in a curriculum and guide for future micro-internships that attract diverse students into the heritage museum workforce with additional opportunities and added career-building potential.
- **The Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington** received a \$211,379 Museums for America-Community Anchors award to provide specialized training for zoo staff and volunteer mentors to design an inclusive volunteer program and remove access barriers for individuals with disabilities. The zoo will work with an advisory council composed of disability partner organizations and community members to provide expert guidance on the creation of an accessible and inclusive environment, the development of a training manual, modifications to institutional volunteer policies and procedures, and the recruitment of volunteers. A newly hired inclusion coordinator will develop and conduct a series of trainings for zoo staff and volunteers. The sustainable inclusive training model created through this project will be applicable to other cultural organizations attempting to reduce barriers for participation for all audiences and expand their volunteer programs.

In addition to these examples, I want to share with you an excerpt from the powerful live public witness testimony provided on April 9, 2019 to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies by a witness on AAM's behalf:

“My name is Mairéad Bernadita Brennan. I am one of the many beneficiaries of the Office of Museum Services' funded “Evolutions After School Program” at the **Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, Connecticut**. The Evolutions Afterschool Program is a free science and college-focused program that provides

academic support and science career exploration for 120 students from New Haven and West Haven public school districts. As an aspiring first generation college student, the experience was invaluable since it exposed me to different science careers I would not have otherwise known about. Even more importantly, it normalized the idea of pursuing those careers myself. The program also introduced me to the amazing Peabody Museum staff and high school friends with whom I developed a supportive relationship with over those four years.

Every year we were able to partake in science activities, field trips to colleges and universities, and learned to conduct research to produce our own public science exhibition. We had tremendous opportunities to visit places both inside Yale and also within the broader network of museum education programs. Evolutions students and I attended the Mid-Atlantic Youth Alliance (M.A.Y.A.) conference in the Poconos Mountains, which focused on Outdoor Education. We learned about orienteering, constellations, and biodiversity. Evolutions also visited the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk where we were able to meet teens from their after-school program, which is based on Evolutions.

I was also able to work in a laboratory internship and participate in a youth employment program called Sci. Corps that provides training on exhibit interpretation. I joined Sci. Corps and was eventually promoted to Museum Fellow, where I taught my peers innovative teaching methods, developed curriculum and supervised daily operations. My junior year, I was able to present on the benefits of hiring youth in museums at the Association of Science and Technology Center's conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My senior year, we worked hard to organize the next M.A.Y.A. conference that focused on environmental issues within urban communities.

My peers and I formed a community of growing young leaders who advanced the mission of the Peabody to bring the knowledge it holds to a broader audience. As residents of neighborhoods surrounding Yale University, we brought a unique and essential perspective and enabled the museum to better bring science and local communities together. At Evolutions, my ideas were valued, and I was able to confidently express my opinions while also collaborating with my friends in the program.

Evolutions normalized the idea of pursuing the sciences while also giving us the space to discuss the barriers to access disadvantaged students face. This program was the first time my witness of inequalities and intergenerational trauma was not only taken seriously but also used to dismantle outdated ideas of who "deserves" extracurricular opportunities. I have not experienced a similar space since then, but because I participated in Evolutions as a teenager, I am confident in the validity of my experiences and how I can use it to enact real change.

I continue to use the skill sets I gained from the Evolutions program and firmly believe it helped me to be more fearless in my goals. I, along with other Evolutions participants, poured years into developing, expanding, and supporting the Evolutions After School Program, which was only possible because of funding from the IMLS Office of Museum Services. Now as an alumnus of the program and a Yale University student, there is not a

day that goes by where I am not using a skill set I first developed at Evolutions. I am excited to see the next chapter of Evolutions, as this new generation aims beyond my wildest expectations.

Museums have a profound positive impact on society and I am living proof.”

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. By leveraging significant private, state, and local funding, OMS grants amplify a small federal investment for maximum impact in the community.

Congress overwhelmingly reauthorized IMLS and its Office of Museum Services in late 2018 by enacting the Museum and Library Services Act of 2018 (Public Law No: 115-410). The legislation was passed with widespread bipartisan support by unanimous consent in the Senate and by a vote of 331 to 28 in the House, showing Congress’ renewed bipartisan support for the agency’s programs and a renewed commitment to its funding.

There is high demand for funding from the IMLS Office of Museum Services. In FY 2018 it received 819 applications requesting nearly \$120 million, but current funding has allowed the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly rated grant applications it receives. Despite this funding shortfall, museum attendance has increased, collections are subject to increasing risk – what happened at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris could happen here – and museum staff members need professional development in conservation, education, and technology.

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 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.

If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.