



**Testimony of Laura L. Lott, President and CEO, American Alliance of Museums
to the House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
in support of the IMLS Office of Museum Services
March 23, 2020**

Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Laura Lott, and I am President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). I urge you to provide the Office of Museum Services (OMS) within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with at least \$42.7 million for fiscal year (FY) 2021, the amount approved by the House of Representatives last year. I want to express the museum field's gratitude for the \$38.5 million in funding for OMS in FY 2020, and we applaud the 198 bipartisan Representatives who wrote to you in support of FY 2021 OMS funding. This small program is a vital investment in protecting our nation's cultural treasures, educating students and lifelong learners alike, and bolstering local economies. The American Alliance of Museums, representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, institutions of all types and corporate partners serving the museum field, stands for the broad scope of the museum community.

In addition to regular appropriations, we request at least \$4 billion in supplemental appropriations for IMLS to administer for nonprofit museums in COVID-19 (coronavirus) economic relief to provide emergency assistance. (Please see attached letter.) Museums will be vital to our nation's recovery from this pandemic, and after sudden and long-term closures, they will require financial assistance to reopen, maintain their staffs, provide educational programs to communities, and assist in rebuilding local tourism economies.

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. For example, the total financial impact that museums have on the economy in the state of Connecticut is \$834 million, including 10,229 jobs. For Oklahoma, it is a \$405 million impact supporting 6,404 jobs. Museums spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities and the typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to K-12 students.

IMLS is the primary federal agency responsible for helping museums connect people to information and ideas. Its Office of Museum Services (OMS) supports all types of museums—including aquariums, arboretums, art museums, botanical gardens, children’s museums, historic sites, history museums, military museums, natural history museums, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, zoos, and more—by awarding grants that help them better serve their communities. The 2018-2022 IMLS strategic plan focuses on promoting lifelong learning, strengthening the capacity of museums and libraries to serve their communities, increasing access to information and ideas, and strategically aligning resources to maximize public value.

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. Congress reauthorized IMLS at the end of 2018, by enacting the Museum and Library Services Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-410). This legislation was adopted with widespread bipartisan support, including a vote of 331 to 28 in the House, showing Congress’ renewed

support for the agency's programs and commitment to its funding. IMLS grants to museums are highly competitive and decided through a rigorous peer-review process. In addition to the dollar-for-dollar match generally required of museums, grants often spur more giving by private foundations and individual donors. In FY 2019, the OMS received 938 applications requesting nearly \$134 million, but current funding allows 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, and museum staff members need professional development in conservation, education, and technology.

The Inspire! Grants for Small Museums program, designed to encourage small institutions to apply for OMS funding, generated 202 applications in its first year. OMS awarded 30 grants totaling \$1.1 million, representing 15 percent of the applicants and demonstrating a need for continued support for the nation's small museums. In 2014, IMLS launched Museums for All, a national access initiative. Today, more than 500 participating museums offer deeply discounted admission to visitors who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. More than 1 million people visited a Museums for All museum in 2019 and more than 2.5 million visits have occurred since 2014.

Here are just a few examples of how OMS helps museums better serve their communities: The Discovery Museums in Bridgeport, CT, received a 2019 Museums Empowered award for \$156,428 to develop and implement a continuous improvement process to improve the impact of its STEM programming by strengthening staff skills in using evaluation data. The project will begin with a series of training sessions for

learning programs staff based on feedback from youth regarding the quality of the museum's program delivery and an assessment of staff competencies in positive youth development. Participating staff will benefit from a deeper understanding of data and the ability to build ongoing evaluation and positive youth development practices into their program presentations in a way that supports Social-Emotional Learning outcomes. The project will potentially result in a process and set of tools to quantify the impact of STEM programming that can be shared with other informal learning organizations.

The Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, CT, received a 2019 Museums for America award for \$225,000 to develop, fabricate, and implement "Shark Encounter," an interactive, multimedia, and fully-accessible exhibit and programming experience focused on sharks and shark conservation. Aquarium staff will partner with experts and stakeholders on the project. Exhibit elements will include a live shark "touch pool" and digital touchscreen interactives. Through the exhibit, audiences will learn more about sharks, the scientists who study them, current threats facing sharks, and how to support shark conservation. A swimming sharks video projection will provide a virtual underwater experience for visitors. The museum will also produce education and outreach kits with hands-on materials for use by exhibit interpreters as well as onsite and offsite educators. Public education events during Shark Week in 2020 and 2021 will complement the exhibit and engage audiences in the importance of shark conservation.

The Mark Twain House and Museum in Hartford, CT, received a 2019 Museums for America award for \$7,300 to conserve three 19th-century books in its collections that belonged to Samuel Clemens ("Mark Twain") and that bear his handwritten notes and inscriptions. The three books are prioritized for conservation due to their fragile

condition, and because of the insights they provide into the author, his work and its impact on literature, and the personal experiences and relationships that influenced his views on pivotal issues such as race and prejudice. The museum will engage conservators to stabilize the books and address condition problems that were identified in previous conservation assessments completed for each of the books. After the conservation is completed, the books will be available for research purposes and for display at the museum and other institutions.

The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums in Oklahoma City, OK, received a National Leadership Grant for Museums for \$250,000 to provide training and resources to assist up to 15 Native communities with planning for cultural facilities. Working with planners, architects, designers, and other experts, ATALM will provide web-based and in-person training on the various phases of strategic planning and building cultural facilities; consultations with professional experts; and access to design plans that can be tailored to the needs of individual communities. The team will also facilitate access to case-studies and related resources and materials and site visits to recently constructed cultural facilities. The project will result in freely available resources, new tools, research findings, services, and models that may be widely used, adapted, scaled, and replicated by Native and non-Native communities.

In closing, I highlight recent 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. Museums have a profound positive impact on society. If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.