

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May XX, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

COVID-19 related closures are jeopardizing the survival of the nation's museum community. We write to request that Congress provide substantial relief beyond that which was included in the CARES Act, so the nonprofit museum sector can continue to pay their employees, provide online services to community members, and reopen once the crisis subsides.

Most museums anticipate closures and reduced attendance through at least the end of 2020. Normal revenue from admissions fees, retail sales, and event rentals have effectively ceased, and charitable contributions are expected to continue to decline dramatically. According to the American Alliance of Museums, museums are losing at least \$33 million a day due to COVID-19 related closures, and are in dire need of additional significant federal support.

As you develop phase 4 COVID-19 response and recovery legislation, we urge you to include at least \$2 billion for the Institute for Museums and Library Services to administer for nonprofit museums in COVID-19 economic relief legislation to provide emergency assistance through the end of 2020.

The nonprofit museum community operates on thin margins of financial sustainability, without large designated operational reserve funds, and is often largely dependent on earned revenue from people visiting in-person. With their doors shuttered for this extended stretch of time, as many as 30% of museums, mostly in small and rural communities, will not reopen without significant additional emergency financial assistance.

Museums are a robust and diverse business sector, including African American museums, aquariums, arboreta, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, cultural museums, historic sites, historical societies, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, public gardens, railway museums, science and technology centers, and zoos.

These institutions are powerful engines for our nation's economy. Economic impact data compiled by the American Alliance of Museums and Oxford Economics shows that museums contribute \$50 billion a year to the U.S. economy and generate \$12 billion in tax revenue to local, state, and

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federal governments.<sup>1</sup> Museums also are vital local sources of employment, supporting 726,000 direct and indirect jobs annually.<sup>2</sup> Museums spend more than \$2 billion a year on education.<sup>3</sup> The collapse of the museum sector would have devastating impacts for this country's economy and educational system.

There is also widespread consensus among Americans that we should invest in our museums. According to a recent public opinion poll, 96% of Americans would think positively of their elected officials taking legislative action to support museums, regardless of political persuasion or community size.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, 97% of Americans believe that museums are educational assets, and 89% believe that museums contribute important economic benefits to their community.<sup>5</sup> Museums are also the most trusted source of information in America, rated higher than local papers, nonprofit researchers, the U.S. government, or academic researchers.<sup>6</sup> Museums can leverage this high level of public trust to provide education on COVID-19 and fight misinformation about its spread. By empowering the public with the information they need to make informed decisions and lower their risk of contracting or spreading disease, museums can help sustain healthy communities, maintain calm, and fight discrimination and xenophobia, which have spiked in recent months.

Even as museums are experiencing closures and significant losses in revenue, they are meeting increased demand for their services and safeguarding and supporting their communities. They are contributing to the ongoing education of our country's children by providing lesson plans, online learning opportunities, and drop-off learning kits to teachers and families. They are using their outdoor spaces to grow and donate produce to area food banks; and maintaining these spaces for individuals to safely relax, enjoy nature, and recover from the mental health impacts of social isolation. They are donating their PPE and scientific equipment to fight COVID-19, and providing access to child care and meals to families of health care workers and first responders. In the midst of financial distress, they are even raising funds for community relief. Museums are community anchors, and are pivotal to our nation's ability to manage through the pandemic and recover.

Museums are essential for educating our children, preserving our history, and maintaining strong local economies. The COVID-19 pandemic has levied tremendous financial pressure on the country's museums, and it is critical that Congress direct substantial additional federal relief for these institutions to weather this crisis and remain community bedrocks for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Economics, "Museums as Economic Engines," December 2017, <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/American-Alliance-of-Museums-web.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Museums Facts & Data," <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/museum-facts-data/>

<sup>4</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Museums & Public Opinion," 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Museums-Public-Opinion-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> American Alliance of Museums, "Museums Facts & Data."

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator