



**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
May 26, 2022**

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 \$54.5 million for fiscal year (FY) 2023, the amount initially endorsed by this subcommittee last year. We also request that the agency be encouraged to explore establishing, and to fund projects related to, a roadmap to strengthen the structural support for a museum Grants to States program administered by OMS, as authorized by the Museum and Library Services Act, *in addition* to the agency's current critical direct grants to museums.

AAM—representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, museums of all types, and corporate partners serving the museum field—stands for the broad scope of the museum community.

I want to express the museum field's gratitude for the \$47.5 million in funding for OMS in FY 2022, and we applaud the bipartisan group of 136 Representatives who wrote to you in support of FY 2023 OMS funding. We also applaud the President's budget proposal for additional funding for OMS as steps in the right direction of increasing critical funds available to museums.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, OMS has provided critical leadership to the museum community through its CARES Act and American Rescue Plan grants, and the agency has been providing science-based information and recommended practices to reduce the risk of

transmission of COVID-19 to staff and visitors engaging in the delivery of museum services. Its Communities for Immunity partnership is working to boost COVID-19 vaccine confidence and access in communities across the country.

Museums are a robust and diverse business sector, including African American museums, aquariums, arboreta, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, culturally-specific 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.

Museums are economic engines and job creators: According to [*Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report*](#), pre-pandemic U.S. museums supported more than 726,000 jobs and contributed \$50 billion to the U.S. economy per year, including significant impact on individual states. 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. Nationally, 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. The [*IMLS FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan*](#) frames how the agency envisions meeting the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the American public. OMS supports all types of museums by awarding grants that help them better serve their communities. 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, with wide bipartisan support. OMS 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 2021, Congress provided \$257 million to IMLS, of which \$40.5 million was directed to the Office of Museum Services. With this funding, OMS provided 275 grants totaling \$40.5 million to museums and related organizations in 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. By leveraging significant private, state, and local funding, OMS grants amplify a small federal investment for maximum impact in the community. There is high demand for funding from the IMLS Office of Museum Services. In FY 2021 OMS received 943 applications requesting more than \$154 million, but current funding has allowed the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly rated grant applications it receives. \$54.5 million in FY 2023 funding would allow OMS to increase its grant capacity for museums, funds which museums will need to help recover from the pandemic and continue to serve their communities. This funding increase would still be greatly shy of the high demand of \$154 million in highly rated grant applications the agency received in FY 2021.

Museums are vital to our nation's recovery from this pandemic, and after sudden and long-term closures, they will require financial assistance to remain open, maintain their staffs, provide educational programs to communities, and assist in rebuilding local tourism economies. PPP 1 and PPP 2, and Shuttered Venue Operators Grants (limited to museums with theatres with fixed seating) provided a critical lifeline for many museums. But the museum field will need robust ongoing support from IMLS, especially as not all museums were eligible for pandemic relief funds. According to a report by McKinsey and Company, the arts, entertainment, and

recreation sectors will not fully recover from this public health crisis and muted economy until 2025.

Indeed, the pandemic has inflicted profound damage on US museums, the vast majority of which are 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organizations. The museum field will take years to recover to pre-pandemic levels of staffing, revenue, and attendance. Far fewer museums than initially expected are in danger of permanent closure and tens of thousands of jobs were saved thanks to several federal relief programs. However, according to our most [recent survey](#), 2021 proved to be another painful year in which operating income sank further and attendance was down nearly 40 percent for many of our nation's museums.

Museums will be essential to rebuilding communities as we emerge from the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, museums across the country have continued 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, as well as maintaining these spaces for individuals to safely relax, enjoy nature, and recover from the mental health impacts of social isolation. They provided access to childcare and meals to families of health care workers and first responders, have donated their PPE and scientific equipment to fight COVID-19, and are serving as vaccination centers. Museums are demonstrating the critical role they play in our country's infrastructure and deepening their social impact in their communities, addressing learning loss, and fostering intra-community trust and dialogue. Here are just two examples of how OMS helps museums better serve the public:

In 2021, the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford, Connecticut, was awarded an OMS grant of \$219,385 for a new public-facing initiative, the Community Historian Project.

This contemporary collecting project—which gathers items of the recent past as well as from events happening today—will develop community historians to identify, document, and preserve their experiences as residents of Connecticut, and share these experiences during a series of community presentations. In collaboration with Central Connecticut State University, the Connecticut Digital Archive, and public libraries in Hartford, New Haven, and Norwich, this initiative addresses the need for contemporary collecting in and throughout the state. The museum seeks to provide a better understanding of Connecticut residents' lived history, improve education and career opportunities for Central Connecticut State University students, strengthen relationships between the museum and Connecticut residents, and build a more diverse collection at the museum that reflects Connecticut's different communities.

In 2022, the Chickasaw Nation, located in south-central Oklahoma, was awarded an OMS grant of \$50,000 for the Chickasaw Nation Division of History and Culture to install a custom exhibit case at Fort Washita to appropriately display historical tribal artifacts. Fort Washita is an important historical location for the Chickasaw people. After closing and reducing services during COVID-19, Fort Washita is preparing to reopen to the general public. This planned exhibit case will display cultural artifacts that are currently in storage. This exhibit case will also allow for continued social distancing and a safe environment for Chickasaw citizens, schools, and visitors from surrounding communities to Fort Washita beginning May 2022.

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.