



**Testimony of Laura L. Lott,
President and CEO, American Alliance of Museums,
www.aam-us.org
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 8, 2017**

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of our members and the nation's larger museum community. My name is Laura L. Lott and I serve as President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums. I respectfully request that the subcommittee make a renewed investment in museums in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. I urge you to fully fund the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) at its most recent authorized level of \$38.6 million.

Before explaining this request, I want to express gratitude for the subcommittee's recommendation of \$31.269 million for OMS in its FY 2017 proposal. While we are alarmed by any proposed reduction in the already miniscule federal support for America's museums, we recognize that this total would have been a proportionally *smaller* cut than the subcommittee's reduced 302(b) allocation for FY 2017. I understand that the subcommittee may face an even further reduced allocation for FY 2018, and acknowledge that you must make difficult decisions. In this context, however, I would posit that this extremely 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.

The Alliance is proud to represent the full range of our nation's 33,000 museums—including aquariums, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, culturally specific museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, science and technology centers, and zoos, among others—along with the professional staff and volunteers who work for and with museums.

Museums are economic engines and job creators: We are proud to report that U.S. museums employ 400,000 people and directly contribute \$21 billion to their local economies every year. Museums and other nonprofit arts institutions form a national cultural infrastructure that annually generates \$22 billion in local, state, and federal tax revenues, far more than it receives from government sources.

This subcommittee in particular may also be interested in the ways museums are providing educational programming and the results of this investment:

- Museums spend more than \$2 billion each year on education activities; the typical museum devotes three-quarters 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, mathematics and science in third grade than children who did not. This benefit is also seen in the subgroup of children who are most at risk for deficits and delays in achievement.

- According to a recent study by researchers at the University of Arkansas, 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, adapting their programs in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography and social studies.
- 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 roughly 60 percent in the past decade—museums are often quite literally the classroom.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports the museum field, and OMS awards grants in every state to help museums digitize, enhance and preserve their collections; provide teacher professional development; and create innovative, cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary programs and exhibits for schools and the public. It is currently due for reauthorization, and has been regularly reauthorized in the past with broad bipartisan support. The most recent reauthorization (Public Law 111-340) cleared Congress unanimously in 2010, authorizing \$38.6 million annually for the IMLS Office of Museum Services to meet the growing demand for museum programs and services. The Fiscal Year 2016 appropriation of \$31.3 million still falls well below its recent high of \$35.2 million in FY 2010.

We applaud the 160 bipartisan Representatives who wrote to you in support of FY 2017 OMS funding, including record numbers of Democrats and Republicans as well as current subcommittee members Lee, Pocan, and Clark.

Here are two examples of how IMLS Office of Museum Services funding has recently been used:

Expanding Engagement with Families Affected by Autism—Morris Museum

(Morristown, NJ) was awarded \$100,000 in 2015 to develop, implement, and evaluate a free suite of resources and services designed to enable families who have members on the autism spectrum and other special needs to enjoy a more enriching experience in a sensitive environment within the museum. With resources such as sensory friendly theatre productions, tactile exhibitions, pre-visit guides, and a family comfort room, the museum aims to increase the number of individuals with special needs served by its programs.

Improved Collections Care and Public Access—Peabody Museum of Natural

History (Yale University, New Haven, CT) was awarded \$97,717 in 2016 to significantly improve storage conditions and accessibility of collections that are currently at risk due to substandard housing. The grant will also enable proper attribution in an online database, both ensuring the long-term preservation of the collection and increasing its availability to students and researchers.

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 additional giving by private foundations and individual donors. Two-thirds of Museums for America grantees report that their grant positioned the museum to receive additional private funding.

Due to the large number of grant applications and the limited funds available, many highly-rated grant proposals go unfunded each year. In 2016, the Office of Museum Services received 755 applications requesting \$115.5 million, but was only able to meet 27 percent of this need. These figures do not take into account the fact that many museums may not even apply for grants due to the unlikelihood of being funded.

Again, I know the subcommittee faces difficult decisions and the museum community is grateful for your previous support. I hope you will consider this modest request in the context of the essential role that museums play in communities nationwide, as well as their immense economic and educational impact. If I can provide any additional information about museums in your community, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you once again for the opportunity to submit this testimony today.