

**Testimony of  
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**House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
March 15, 2013**

Chairman Kingston, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Ford Bell and I serve as President of the American Alliance of Museums. I request that the Subcommittee make a renewed investment in museums in FY14. We urge your support for \$38.6 million for the Office of Museum Services (OMS) at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), its fully-authorized amount.

The Alliance is proud to represent the full range of our nation's 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. We are honored to work on behalf of the 17,500 museums nationwide that employ 400,000 people, and annually spend over \$2 billion on K-12 educational programming, receive more than 90 million visits from primary and secondary school students, and directly spend \$21 billion in their local economies.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports our field and OMS awards grants to help museums digitize, enhance and preserve their collections; provide teacher training; and create innovative, cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary programs and exhibits for schools and the public. The 2012-2016 IMLS Strategic Plan lists clear priorities: placing the learner at the center of the museum experience, promoting museums as strong community anchors, supporting museums' stewardship of their collections, advising the President and Congress on how to sustain and increase public access to information and ideas, and serving as a model independent federal agency maximizing value for the American public. IMLS is indeed a model federal agency.

In late 2010, legislation to reauthorize IMLS for five years was enacted (by voice vote in the House and by unanimous consent in the Senate). The bipartisan reauthorization included several provisions proposed by the museum field, including enhanced support for conservation and preservation, emergency preparedness and response, and statewide capacity building. The reauthorization also specifically supports efforts at the state level to leverage museum resources, including statewide needs assessments and the development of state plans to improve and maximize museum services throughout the state. The bill (now Public Law 111-340) authorized \$38.6 million for the IMLS Office of Museum Services to meet the growing demand for museum programs and services. The FY12 appropriation of \$30,859,000—equal to President Obama's FY13 budget request – represents a nearly 15% decrease from the FY10 appropriation of \$35,212,000.

The further 5% decrease resulting from sequestration will only make it even more difficult for OMS to help museums connect people to information and ideas. We urge the subcommittee to provide the full \$38.6 million for the IMLS Office of Museum Services.

Museums are essential in our communities for many reasons:

**Museums are key education providers.** They design exhibitions, educational programs, classroom kits, and online resources in coordination with state, local and common core curriculum standards in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies. Museums also offer experiential learning opportunities, STEM education, youth training, and job preparedness. They reach beyond the scope of instructional programming for schoolchildren by also providing critical teacher training. There is a growing consensus that whatever the new educational era looks like, it will focus on the development of a core set of skills: critical thinking, the ability to synthesize information, the ability to innovate, creativity, and collaboration. Museums are uniquely situated to help learners develop these core skills.

**Museums create jobs and support local economies.** Museums serve as economic engines, bolster local infrastructure, and spur tourism. Both the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Governors Association have noted that cultural assets such as museums are essential to attracting businesses, a skilled workforce, and local and international tourism.

**Museums address community challenges.** Many museums offer programs tailored to seniors, veterans, children with special needs, persons with disabilities, and more, greatly expanding their reach and impact. For example, some have programs designed specifically for children on the autism spectrum, some are teaching English as a Second Language, and some are working directly with Alzheimer's patients. Many museums facilitate job training programs, provide vegetable gardens for low-income communities, or serve as locations for supervised visits through the family court system. In 2012, more than 1,800 museums participated in the Blue Star Museums initiative, offering free admission to all active duty and reserve personnel and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

**Digitization and traveling exhibitions bring museum collections to underserved populations.**

Teachers, students, and researchers benefit when cultural institutions are able to increase access to trustworthy information through online collections and traveling exhibits. Most museums, however, need more help in digitizing collections.

Grants to museums are highly competitive and decided through a rigorous, peer-reviewed process. Even the most ardent deficit hawks view the IMLS grant-making process as a model for the nation. It would take approximately \$129 million to fund all the grant applications that IMLS received from museums in 2012 but, given the significant budget cuts, many highly-rated grant applications go unfunded each year:

- Only 31% of Museums for America/Conservation Project Support projects were funded;
- Only 19% of National Leadership/21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum Professionals/Sparks Ignition Grants for Museums/Connecting to Collections Implementation projects were funded;
- Only 61% of Native American/Hawaiian Museum Services projects were funded; and
- Only 33% of African American History and Culture projects were funded.

It should be noted that each time a museum grant is awarded, additional local and private funds are also leveraged. In addition to the required dollar-for-dollar match required of museums, grants often spur additional giving by private foundations and individual donors. A recent IMLS study found that 67% of museums that received Museums for America grants reported that their IMLS grant had positioned the museum to receive additional private funding.

**Here are just two examples of how Office of Museum Services funding is used:**

The Telfair Museum in Savannah, Georgia was awarded a \$112,963 Museums for America grant in 2010 to begin a full-scale reinterpretation project on the subject of urban slavery in the city's past. The complete picture of this largely unstudied form of slavery in Savannah—a microcosm of the nation during this time—is told utilizing the Telfair's own historic assets and stories. In a good example of community leveraging, this project received support from the City of Savannah, Live Oak Libraries, Second African Baptist Church, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, Connecticut was awarded a \$148,050 Museums for America grant in 2012 to support the Peabody Teachers Collaborative on Global Change (CGC), a professional development program for teachers in ecology and environmental science. The science literacy program serves several local school districts, particularly Title 1 school districts of New Haven and Hartford, and other districts in Connecticut. The project targets 48 schools and approximately 1,500 students, together with their families and communities. By making excellent use of the Museum's exhibits, particularly the world-renowned diorama halls, the program's impact is heightened for both teachers and students.

In closing, I would like to thank you once again for the opportunity to submit this testimony today.