



**Testimony of Mairéad Bernadita Brennan
Evolutions After School Program Student/Yale Peabody Museum of Natural
History, New Haven, Connecticut, on behalf of the 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
April 9, 2019**

Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. My name is Mairéad Bernadita Brennan. I am one of the many beneficiaries of the Office of Museum Services' funded "Evolutions After School Program" at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, Connecticut, and am here today to respectfully request that the subcommittee make a renewed investment in museums in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. I urge you to provide the OMS within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with at least \$38.6 million, its recently re-authorized funding level. I want to express the field's gratitude for the \$34.7 million in funding for OMS in FY 2019 and we applaud the 178 bipartisan Representatives who wrote to you in support of FY 2020 OMS funding. This small program is a vital investment in protecting our nation's cultural treasures, educating students like me and lifelong learners, 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.

I participated in one of those museum programs which benefitted from OMS funding, the Evolutions After School Program housed in the Peabody Museum of Natural History. The Evolutions Afterschool Program is a free science and college-

focused program that provides academic support and science career exploration for 120 students from New Haven and West Haven public school districts. As an aspiring first generation college student, the experience was invaluable since it exposed me to different science careers I would not have otherwise known about. Even more importantly, it normalized the idea of pursuing those careers myself. The program also introduced me to the amazing Peabody Museum staff and high school friends with whom I developed a supportive relationship with over those four years.

Every year we were able to partake in science activities, field trips to colleges and universities, and learned to conduct research to produce our own public science exhibition. We had tremendous opportunities to visit places both inside Yale and also within the broader network of museum education programs. Evolutions students and I attended the Mid-Atlantic Youth Alliance (M.A.Y.A.) conference in the Poconos Mountains, which focused on Outdoor Education. We learned about orienteering, constellations, and biodiversity. Evolutions also visited the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk where we were able to meet teens from their after-school program, which is based on Evolutions.

I was also able to work in a laboratory internship and participate in a youth employment program called Sci. Corps that provides training on exhibit interpretation. I joined Sci. Corps and was eventually promoted to Museum Fellow, where I taught my peers innovative teaching methods, developed curriculum and supervised daily operations. My junior year, I was able to present on the benefits of hiring youth in museums at the Association of Science and Technology Center's conference in

Albuquerque, New Mexico. My senior year, we worked hard to organize the next M.A.Y.A. conference that focused on environmental issues within urban communities.

My peers and I formed a community of growing young leaders who advanced the mission of the Peabody to bring the knowledge it holds to a broader audience. As residents of neighborhoods surrounding Yale University, we brought a unique and essential perspective and enabled the museum to better bring science and local communities together. At Evolutions, my ideas were valued, and I was able to confidently express my opinions while also collaborating with my friends in the program.

Evolutions normalized the idea of pursuing the sciences while also giving us the space to discuss the barriers to access disadvantaged students face. It was one of the only spaces I felt I had the support to combat the unequal distribution of educational opportunities in New Haven, which are typically given to students from strong academic backgrounds. Unfortunately, young people are acutely aware that grades are the basis by which their worth as humans is so often calculated. My experiences throughout elementary and high school showed me how grades can dramatically and negatively impact what children and young adults dream they can achieve. Grades only show part of what can be achieved within the walls of a classroom, but Evolutions recognizes the brilliance in youth that can be unleashed outside those walls by explicitly stating that academic achievement is not a factor in the application process. This has helped the program provide opportunities for brilliant, but disadvantaged, students from under-supported high schools in the area.

This program was the first time my witness of inequalities and intergenerational trauma was not only taken seriously but also used to dismantle outdated ideas of who

“deserves” extracurricular opportunities. I have not experienced a similar space since then, but because I participated in Evolutions as a teenager, I am confident in the validity of my experiences and how I can use it to enact real change. I continue to use the skill sets I gained from the Evolutions program and firmly believe it helped me to be more fearless in my goals. I, along with other Evolutions participants, poured years into developing, expanding, and supporting the Evolutions After School Program, which was only possible because of funding from the IMLS Office of Museum Services. Now as an alumnus of the program and a Yale University student, there is not a day that goes by where I am not using a skill set I first developed at Evolutions. I am excited to see the next chapter of Evolutions, as this new generation aims beyond my wildest expectations.

My personal experience is borne out by national data on the many positive impacts of museums. 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 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. The FY 2019

appropriation of \$34.7 million still falls below its recent high of \$35.2 million in FY 2010. Congress reauthorized IMLS at the very end of last year, 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 2018, the OMS received 819 applications requesting nearly \$120 million, but current funding allows the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly-rated grant applications it receives.

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 and I am living proof. While my testimony today focused on museums, I would also like acknowledge the role that libraries have played in the intellectual life of New Haven teens, including the New Haven Public Library, a 2019 finalist for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service. If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony today.