



Five Minute Oral 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

Good afternoon Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Mairead 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.

I am here today on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) which represents US museums. I'm here to request the Subcommittee provide the Office of Museum Services (OMS) within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with at least \$38.6 million, its recently re-authorized level – a reauthorization that was enacted late last year with overwhelming bipartisan support.

I participated in one of the many museum programs that has benefitted from OMS funding: the Evolutions After School Program, housed at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, 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.

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, including the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk, whose after school program is based on Evolutions.

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.

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.

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 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. As a Yale University student 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. The Evolutions program was only possible because of funding from the IMLS Office of Museum Services.

My personal experience is borne out by national data. Museums are economic engines and job creators: U.S. museums support more than 726,000 jobs and pump \$50 billion annually into the economy. The financial impact that museums have on the economy in Connecticut is \$834 million, including 10,229 jobs. For Oklahoma it’s a \$405 million impact supporting 6,404 jobs.

IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports the nation’s museums. This small program is a vital investment in protecting our nation’s cultural treasures, educating students and lifelong learners, and bolstering local economies. The IMLS grant-making process is rigorous and competitive and these grants leverage state, local and private funding.

We are grateful for the \$34.7 million in funding for OMS in FY 2019. But I note that it’s well shy of the roughly \$120 million that museums request annually through highly-rated grant applications.

In closing, I highlight a recent national poll showing 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, worthy of federal investment, and I am living proof.

I also share with you for the record a bipartisan letter to the Subcommittee – supporting funding for OMS – signed by 178 of your House colleagues.

If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.