



**Testimony of Laura L. Lott, President and CEO, American Alliance of Museums
to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
in support of the IMLS Office of Museum Services
May 22, 2020**

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, 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 \$42.7 million for fiscal year (FY) 2021, the amount approved by the House of Representatives last year.

I want to express the museum field's gratitude for the \$38.5 million in funding for OMS in FY 2020, and we applaud the bipartisan group of 41 Senators who wrote to you in support of FY 2021 OMS funding. This small program is a vital investment in protecting our nation's cultural treasures, educating students and lifelong learners alike, 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.

In addition to regular appropriations, we request at least \$6 billion in supplemental appropriations for IMLS-Office of Museum Services to administer specifically for nonprofit museums in COVID-19 economic relief to provide emergency assistance.* This would include assisting museums in developing and sharing distance learning content, as well as pandemic recovery planning and implementation. (Please see this [request letter](#) from more than 50 national, regional, and state museum associations.) Museums will be vital to our nation's recovery from this pandemic, and after sudden and long-term closures, they will require financial assistance to reopen, maintain their staffs, provide educational programs to communities, and assist in rebuilding local tourism economies.

Even as museums are experiencing closures and significant losses in revenue, they are meeting an increase in demand for their services and safeguarding and supporting their communities. They are contributing to the ongoing education of our country's children by providing free 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 and are maintaining these spaces for individuals to safely relax, enjoy nature, and recover from the mental health impacts of social isolation. They are donating their PPE and scientific equipment to fight COVID-19, and providing access to child care and meals to families of health care workers and first responders. In the midst of financial distress, they are even raising funds for community

* The \$6 billion figure is a conservative estimate based on budget numbers from several museum associations and data from the Oxford Economics/AAM's "Museums as Economic Engines" study. The American Alliance of Museums calculates that museums are losing at least \$33 million a day due to closures as a result of COVID-19, will be in desperate need of significant federal support, and that the U.S. Congress needs to include at least \$6 billion for nonprofit museums in economic relief legislation to provide emergency assistance through December. The study shows the museum field directly employs 372,100 people and generates \$15.9 billion in income each year. It costs \$1.3 billion to keep 370,000 people employed per month so the estimated cost through December 2020 is approximately \$6 billion minus the two-months of expected assistance from SBA-related loan programs.

relief. Museums are pivotal to our nation's ability to manage through the pandemic and recover from it as our nation opens back up.

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*](#), 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 Missouri is \$852 million, including 13,653 jobs. For Washington, it is a \$1.01 billion impact supporting 14,145 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 responsible for helping museums connect people to information and ideas. Its Office of Museum Services (OMS) supports all types of museums by awarding grants that help them better serve their communities. The 2018-2022 IMLS strategic plan focuses on promoting lifelong learning, strengthening the capacity of museums and libraries to serve their communities, increasing access to information and ideas, and strategically aligning resources to maximize public value.

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, by enacting the Museum and Library Services Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-410). This legislation was adopted with widespread bipartisan support, including unanimous consent in the Senate and 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 awarded 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. But current funding allows the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly rated grant applications it receives. For example, in FY 2019, the OMS received 938 applications requesting nearly \$134 million. Despite this funding shortfall the need has never been greater: museum attendance prior to the pandemic had increased, collections are subject to increasing risk, and museum staff members need professional development in conservation, education, and technology.

The Inspire! Grants for Small Museums program, designed to encourage small institutions to apply for OMS funding, generated 202 applications in its first year. OMS awarded 30 grants totaling \$1.1 million, representing 15 percent of the applicants and demonstrating a need for continued support for the nation's small museums. In 2014, IMLS launched Museums for All, a national access initiative. Today, more than 500 participating museums offer deeply discounted

admission to visitors who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. More than 1 million people visited a Museums for All museum in 2019 and more than 2.5 million visits have occurred since 2014.

Here are just a few examples of how OMS helps museums better serve their communities:

In 2018, **The University of Missouri in Saint Louis** received a \$49,979 National Leadership Grant to support a leadership team from the university to partner with nine cultural heritage organizations, including museums, to prototype a collaborative model for internships that offers peer support and fosters mentorship to students from faculty and site coordinators. The project team will bring students, faculty, and site supervisors together for a project team kick-off meeting to design a micro-internship program allowing diverse students to participate in 2-3 week fully-paid internships at heritage sites across the U.S. For two to three weeks, six to ten students will work in pairs at preselected internship sites with the support of mentors. The project activities will result in a curriculum and guide for future micro-internships that attract diverse students into the heritage museum workforce with additional opportunities and added career-building potential.

In 2019, **the Missouri History Museum in St. Louis** was awarded a \$250,000 Museums for America Office of Museum Services grant to process, survey, and make publicly accessible the 1,894 objects in its Charles A. Lindbergh Collection. Objects include diverse personal items, gifts associated with Lindbergh's 1927 transatlantic flight and publicity tours, and wedding gifts presented to Charles and his wife Anne. The museum will hire two collections specialists and one special projects photographer, overseen by its collections manager, to perform the work. Conservators specializing in objects, paintings, paper, and textiles will perform detailed conservation surveys. Full records with digitized images will be made publicly accessible via the museum's online collections portal. The project will be the first phase of an eight-year, multistage collections initiative culminating in 2027 with the centennial of Lindbergh's legendary transatlantic flight.

In 2019, **the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis in Missouri** was awarded a \$193,753 Museums for America grant to expand its ArtReach programs in response to the needs of St. Louis students, teachers, and schools. The museum will provide arts education opportunities for middle and high school students by partnering with nearby schools through multi-week engagements with teaching artists, hosting drop-in workshops introducing contemporary art practices, and organizing field trips to the museum. The project will also include mentoring for art teachers in partner schools and a portfolio day to prepare high school students for college admissions processes. With the guidance of an evaluation consultant, the museum will measure success using formative and summative evaluation techniques, and develop tools to consistently track and analyze project activities.

In 2019, **the Children's Museum of Tacoma, Washington**, was awarded a \$186,567 National Leadership Grant to develop and disseminate an evaluation tool that enables museums to measure the impact their programming on military families. The museum will work with a variety of partner organizations, including FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research,

and the Army Analytics Group, to adapt two existing frameworks for use by museums. The project partners will test iterations of the tool, which will be informed by focus groups with military families. The museum will disseminate project resources to support the evaluation of programming tailored for military families by launching a web page with explanatory information, downloadable content, and a recorded webinar. The museum and its project partners will share project results through presentations at national conferences.

In 2019, the **Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience in Seattle, Washington**, was awarded a \$136,134 Museums for America grant to draw on its collections to supplement the Asian Pacific American (APA) history curriculum in Washington state schools. Working with a committee of local educators, special education teachers, and disability advocates, the museum will research, write, and compile a new curriculum exploring the culture, immigrant and refugee history, and APA experiences in the state. The curriculum will align with state standards and address one grade at each level-elementary, middle, and high school. Each lesson will be available through an online web portal and will include multisensory lessons and components that address a variety of learning styles. Additional project activities will include teacher training opportunities, school tours at the museum based on the curriculum, and a professional evaluation.

In 2019, **Imagine Children's Museum in Everett, Washington**, was awarded a \$154,448 Museums for America grant to work with community partners to develop the Positive Futures program to support resilience in children who have experienced trauma. The program will focus on two populations--those in kinship care and children who have an incarcerated parent or loved one. A taskforce of museum staff and community partners will incorporate the experiences learned in a previous pilot program by adding elements to specifically address social emotional and core life skills. Using playful learning formats, the museum will present monthly programs for 12-15 families per group, and take-home materials will build on the learning at the museum between sessions. Working with an evaluation consultant the project team will measure child learning and refine the programs based on feedback from caregivers. The museum will also develop a playbook for other children's museums interested in offering similar programs for their communities.

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.