



Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability

ATTN: Facility Closure

703 Stratton Building

Springfield, IL 62706

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Co-Chair Senator Donne Trotter, Co-Chair Representative Donald Moffitt, and members of the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today. My name is Laura L. Lott, President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), and I urge you to make a recommendation against closing the Illinois State Museum (ISM) System.

AAM proudly represents the full range of our nation's museums—including art museums, historic sites, natural history museums, children's museums, presidential libraries, science and technology centers, and zoos, among other institutions—along with the professional staff and volunteers who work for and with museums. We work on behalf of the nation's museums, which invest more than \$2 billion annually on educational programs and receive more than 55 million visits each year from primary and secondary school students.

Not only do museums provide spaces for education and research and cultural preservation, they also serve as economic engines in communities around the nation. Museums bolster our communities' economic infrastructure: They directly contribute \$21 billion to their local economies, employ 400,000 people from those communities, and spur tourism. Both the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Governors Association agree that assets such as museums are essential to attracting businesses, a skilled workforce, and local and international tourism.

That is the point I want to emphasize with you today: Museums—including those that comprise the ISM System—are a vital part of Illinois' economy. Closing the ISM System could extinguish this source of vitality.

I appreciate the very difficult decisions before the Commission. The choices you must make are not easy. But the state will not find the significant cost savings it seeks by shuttering the ISM System.

First, the proposed closure would cost the state resources it can ill-afford to lose. More than \$30 million is spent in Illinois communities by ISM visitors—local, state and national—with about \$18 million spent in Springfield alone. Additionally, the System employs close to 70 people from within the communities it serves. Given the revenue that the museum system spurs, closing the system would burden local economies and risk harming local businesses.

That the museum system is so vital to Illinois' economy and the communities it serves should come as no surprise because the ISM System is well-managed and operates with distinction. For more than 40 years, this Illinois gem has served as a national model by meeting the highest standards of the museum field. The ISM System has earned and maintained accreditation—a mark held by only three percent of institutions nationwide. Accreditation increases a museum's credibility and value to funders, insurers, and the community, while also facilitating collections loans between institutions. Adherence to these standards is assessed by an Accreditation Commission, comprised of museum professionals nominated by the field and charged with making independent decisions regarding accredited status.

On July 9th, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) responded to the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability regarding concerns about the museum losing its accreditation if it does not remain open to the public. While DNR correctly noted that accreditation must be renewed every 10 years, it failed to indicate that museums can lose their accreditation at any time if they are found by the Accreditation Commission to be in violation of the standards set by the museum field or the program's minimum eligibility criteria. Though this is not a regular occurrence, an institution did lose accreditation this way under different circumstances just last year. Risking the ISM System's accreditation by shutting its doors is an unnecessary gamble with this prestigious achievement.

In addition to foregone revenues, closing the ISM System will incur significant costs at a time when the state needs to maximize its resources. Closing a museum is not a simple matter of packing and shipping the state's treasures to some far off place, turning off the lights and shutting the door behind the last person out; it is a burdensome and expensive process.

Furthermore, Illinois risks defaulting on grants, contracts, and loans, which could open the state to potential lawsuits from federal agencies and private donors.

On top of these very concrete losses, closing the ISM System would cause other incalculable and devastating costs to the state of Illinois that it cannot afford. The state risks destroying its well-regarded museum system and in so doing, would lose its top notch researchers and historians. It would miss the opportunity to educate and inspire the 40,000 schoolchildren who visit every year. Most of all, closing the ISM System risks renegeing on Illinois' 138-year charge to protect its cultural and natural heritage for its citizens.

Again, I respect the fact that lawmakers have difficult decisions to make regarding the state budget. While concerns regarding the budget shortfall must be addressed, closing the ISM System to attempt to find cost savings is not the answer. The purported cost savings will not accrue to the state and could, in fact, cost the state revenues. Closing the ISM System is at best a dubious short term gain, and would certainly be a devastating long term loss to the local communities and people it serves.

Let's not leave the state open to potentially increased costs and lawsuits by shutting down this indispensable museum system. Let's not close the doors on the 387,000 tourists, researchers and children that visit the ISM System from around the state, and around our country.

Instead, let's keep the promise made to Illinoisans in 1877 to safeguard our cultural and natural heritage. Let's maintain the integrity of a proven economic development engine for our communities. Let's keep intact the heart and soul of our communities, keeping it strong and vibrant for another 138 years.

It is my hope that my testimony makes clear why the ISM System is vital to Illinois' past, present, and future; how it provides a significant return on investment to Illinois' taxpayers; and what adverse economic effects could occur if this system ceases to exist. Our communities are counting on you to do the right thing on behalf of a vital 138-year institution. I urge you to recommend against closing the Illinois State Museum System. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Laura L Lott
President and CEO