



**Testimony of Marilyn Jackson, President & CEO, 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
May 3, 2024**

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Marilyn Jackson, 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 \$65.5 million for fiscal year (FY) 2025, a much-needed increase of \$10 million accounting for inflation and public need for museum services. In light of museums being banned from House Community Project Funding, which we strongly oppose, increasing funding for competitive grants for museums is all the more critical. We also ask that Congress include museums in, and provide robust funding for, supplemental programs for federal agencies, including IMLS, carrying out Semiquincentennial/America 250 programming and commemorations.

AAM—representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, museums of all types, and corporate partners serving the museum field—stands for the broad scope of the museum community. The American Alliance of Museums’ mission is to champion equitable and impactful museums by connecting people, fostering learning and community, and nurturing museum excellence.

Since 1906, we have been championing museums through advocacy and providing museum professionals with the resources, knowledge, inspiration, and connections they need to move the field forward. Our Alliance of museums and museum professionals seeks to better our communities, and our world, through collaborative human-centered experiences, education, and connection to histories, cultures, the natural world, and one another. Our members spark curiosity and wonder, widen horizons and understanding, and create community connection through a shared commitment to equity and learning.

I want to express the museum field’s gratitude for the \$55.5 million in funding for OMS in FY 2024, and we applaud the bipartisan group of 113 Representatives who wrote to you in support of OMS funding.

There is a museum for everyone, and in every part of the country. Museums are a robust and diverse nonpartisan business and cultural sector, including 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. About 26% of museums are located in rural areas.

Museums are economic engines and job creators: According to [*Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report*](#), pre-pandemic U.S. museums supported more than 726,000 jobs and

contributed \$50 billion to the U.S. economy per year, including significant impact on individual states. For example, the total financial impact that museums have on the economy in the state of Alabama is \$473 million, including 9,410 jobs. For Connecticut, it is a \$834 million impact supporting 10,229 jobs. Nationally, museums spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities and the typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to programs for K-12 students.

IMLS is the primary federal agency responsible for helping museums connect people to information and ideas. The [IMLS FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#) frames how the agency envisions meeting the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the American public. OMS supports all types of museums by awarding grants that help them better serve their communities. 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, with wide bipartisan support. OMS grants to museums are highly competitive and awarded based on 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.

Despite its small size, the IMLS Office of Museum Services is the largest dedicated source of investment in our nation's museums. OMS leadership and vital financial support is more important than ever to museums of every type, large and small, urban and rural, across our country. OMS provides museums essential support to navigate change and continue to improve their services to better enable them to champion lifelong learning, strengthen community engagement and advance collections stewardship and increase access to our nation's cultural heritage. We support efforts by OMS to better understand the needs of the museum field, including a proposed study on the physical condition of museums and libraries and the planned National Museum Survey.

In FY 2023, Congress provided \$295 million to IMLS, of which \$55.5 million was directed to the Office of Museum Services. With this funding, OMS provided 317 grants totaling \$53 million to museums and related organizations in 49 states. By leveraging significant private, state, and local funding, OMS grants amplify a small federal investment for maximum impact in the community. There is high demand for funding from the IMLS Office of Museum Services. In FY 2023 OMS received 749 applications requesting more than \$122 million, but current funding has allowed the agency to fund less than half (40%) of the highly rated grant applications it receives. \$65.5 million in FY 2025 funding would allow OMS to increase its grant capacity for museums, funds which museums will need to continue to help serve their communities. This funding increase would still be greatly shy of the high demand of \$122 million in highly rated grant applications the agency received in FY 2023.

Examples of OMS programs, include *Inspire! Grants for Small Museums* program, designed to encourage small institutions to apply for IMLS funding, generated 216 applications in FY 2023. IMLS made awards to 59 museums through this program, demonstrating a continuing need for support for the nation's small museums. In 2014, OMS launched *Museums for All*, a national access initiative. Today, more than 1,200 participating museums in 50 states, DC, and the US

Virgin Islands offer deeply discounted admission to visitors who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The program has reached over 8 million visitors. In addition, OMS provides critical funding for professional development to improve the recruitment, preparation, and professional development of museum professionals, including those from underrepresented backgrounds.

The museum field continues to face financial strain in the aftermath of the pandemic, with half of museums indicating at least one sign of financial distress. In the six months prior to completing a [recent survey](#), half of museums either lost revenue or had to make difficult decisions on personnel, programs, or other expenditures (or all of the above). Despite the tremendous financial and psychological stress caused by the pandemic, museum professionals underscored the critical role museums play in our country's infrastructure and deepened their social impact in their communities demonstrating that museums are essential community infrastructure.

Here are examples of how OMS helps museums better serve the public:

- The **Boise Art Museum in Boise, Idaho** was awarded a \$50,000 FY 2023 *Inspire! Grants for Small Museums* to launch an experiential learning program for seniors that fosters creative, immersive, and joyful experiences with professional artists, arts partners, and museum professionals. The program will introduce three new program workshops developed by professional teaching artists in collaboration with mindfulness practitioners, partners, and museum staff. The project team will work with local artists and partner with the Idaho Commission on the Arts to identify those with training for developing workshops for older adults as well as arrange for training for new teaching artists. Program participants will develop skills within an artistic medium, view and discuss artworks in the collection, observe a behind-the-scenes aspect of the museum, and benefit from ways that the artistic practice can contribute to general wellbeing, such as developing patience, reducing anxiety, and centering mindfulness for mental acuity, mental dexterity, and overall mental health. Each workshop will culminate in a group activity for reflection and celebration of artistic accomplishments and growth.
- The **Hosanna School Museum in Darlington, MD** was awarded a \$226,338 FY 2023 *Museum Grants for African American History and Culture* to build capacity to expand access to its sites and collections by hiring a new full-time Associate Director position and creating a paid internship program. The increased staff capacity will lead to the creation of grade-specific materials covering the period of Slavery to Reconstruction in Harford County and across the nation; a related trunk show for in-class pre-visit presentations; traveling exhibitions for schools and public buildings; experiential bus tours; Underground Railroad immersive experiences; field trips to relevant sites of memory; walking tours through historically impactful communities; film screenings; panel discussions; and docent training. Through expanded programming and new exhibits this project will engage the public in learning about African Americans' quest for education in the Reconstruction era after the American Civil War and provide consistent access to the Hosanna School Museum and McComas Institute, a landmark Freedmen's Bureau schoolhouse site.

- The **Creative Discovery Museum in Chattanooga, TN** was awarded a \$243,425 FY 2022 *Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff* grant to establish a training and development program designed to meet the career development needs of staff. The program will include three training tracks that use in-person, virtual, and pre-recorded formats. The three different tracks will focus on staff orientation, customer service, and security; job-specific training; and personal development and leadership. Part-time staff will be able to participate in 40 hours of training annually, and full-time staff will be able to participate in 80 hours of training annually. The museum will hire a staff person to coordinate the training program. A staff advisory council will work with the museum's leadership team and a consultant to plan and develop courses. The Creative Discovery Museum Academy resulting from this project will provide a robust employee training and development program to help the museum's staff achieve their career development goals.
- The **Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California Berkeley** was awarded a \$49,770 FY 2023 *National Leadership Grant* to create and test a program that integrates museum learning activities into a Spanish-Language STEM program in order to address the lack of STEM opportunities and role models for Latinx museum visitors and learners. In collaboration with the Oakland Public Library, the project team will enhance an existing series of informal STEM talks by recruiting more Spanish-speaking STEM experts, providing them with individualized science communications training, and incorporating hands-on activities into the lectures. The team will gather insights and use them to make changes before creating a shareable model that provides guidance for other museums that wish to incorporate scientists and community-based partners in engagement programs.
- The **Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin** was awarded a \$249,618 FY 2023 *Museums for America* grant to engage in a state-wide public history project that will expand access to the society's collections and resources by bringing community-based programming into all 72 Wisconsin counties. Project staff will prototype strategies for designing and delivering localized programming in collaboration with approximately 120 community partners, particularly in rural areas. The society will hire a director of experience design, contract with local vendors to create mobile exhibits, and conduct public programming featuring the society's collection, banner exhibits, speakers bureau presentations, and signature events tailored to individual communities. As a result, community partners will have an increased knowledge and sense of ownership of Wisconsin State Historical Society resources and greater trust for future collaborations, supporting the society's long-term goal of becoming a hub for community engagement.

These OMS grants, and many others like them made to museums across the country, make a transforming impact on American museums and the teachers, students, families, and communities they serve.

In closing, I highlight [national public opinion polling](#) that shows that 96% 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 are a wise national investment. If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.