



**Testimony of Marilyn Jackson, President & 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 24, 2024**

Chairman Baldwin, Ranking Member Capito, 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 37 Senators who wrote to you in support of FY 2025 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.

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 Wisconsin is \$600 million, including 9,444 jobs. For West Virginia, it is a \$209 million impact supporting 2,951 jobs. This impact is not limited to cities: more than 25% of museums are in rural areas. 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, OMS 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, 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 understand the essential role they play in their communities, and despite the stress and financial strain, they have deepened their commitment to serving as community assets. Museums are essential community infrastructure.

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

- 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.
- The **Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Tribal Museum and Visitor Center in Hayward, Wisconsin**, was awarded a \$77,634 *Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services* grant to partner with LCO Ojibwe schools, and the LCO Ojibwe University Community Library to create a project-based learning program for 8th to 10th grade students. The Tribe will hire a project coordinator who will serve as a liaison between the museum, library, and LCO schools, and will develop and conduct instructional programming utilizing primary source documents and artifacts. Through collaborative resource-sharing, LCO institutions will provide opportunities that connect Ojibwe students with their heritage in a meaningful context. As a result, the project will deepen students' appreciation of cultural practices and their value and further Tribal-wide efforts to preserve Ojibwe history, culture, and language.
- **Arthurdale Heritage museum in Arthurdale, West Virginia**, was awarded a \$50,000 *Inspire! Grants for Small Museums* grant to develop new strategic plans and emergency preparedness documents. Project activities include conducting a full assessment of the organization to include collections, exhibits, programs, development, community outreach, and preparedness and then drafting and finalizing the two plans. The project will involve hiring a graduate assistant, a strategic planning consultant, and an emergency preparedness consultant who will conduct information gathering through meetings with museum staff and

community stakeholders, draft the new plans, and evaluate the plans that will guide the museum's future. The project will result in a more effective, efficient, and accessible institution for the public.

- The **Washington State Historical Society in Tacoma, Washington**, was awarded a \$249,500 *Museums for America* grant to install a new permanent exhibition that explores the history of the more than 29 tribes of Washington State with an emphasis on interpreting tribal sovereignty. The project team will contract with an exhibition fabricator to build out designs that were developed in partnership with two Native curators and guided by a 10-person Native Advisory Committee. The exhibition will include Indigenous artists selected through an open call, who will create works that comment on and interpret gallery themes. As a result, Tribal nations will feel that their roles in Washington State history have been accurately and honestly portrayed, and visitors will have an increased understanding of tribal sovereignty and its role in state history by learning through an exhibition that centers tribal voices and perspectives.
- The **Museum of Discovery and Science in Fort Lauderdale, Florida**, was awarded a \$240,500 *Museums for America* grant to expand its STEMobile program, a mobile maker space program for early learners ages three to five and their caregivers and teachers. The program will serve 123 early learning centers in the 10 lowest-income zip codes in Broward County that are also the most affected by intergenerational poverty, economic immobility, and lowest educational attainment levels. The project will provide interactive STEM experiences for young children aligned with Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards; a Family Science Night that reinforces the caregiver's role as their child's first teacher; and professional development resources that empower teachers to feel more confident about teaching STEM. The project will help reduce disparities in education for vulnerable young learners and help them succeed.
- The **Exploration Place in Wichita, Kansas**, was awarded a \$28,383 *Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff* grant to implement a digital audience engagement professional development program for its 13 virtual educators and presenters to build staff skills and understanding of digital audience engagement. The project will build staff skills and processes to deliver impactful and engaging programs changing the culture around digital programs, enabling the museum to reach every Kansas county and school district.

These OMS grants, and many others like them, 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.