



March 26, 2025

Keith E. Sonderling  
Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor  
Acting Director, Institute of Museum and Library Services  
955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Deputy Secretary Sonderling:

We write to congratulate you on your appointment as Acting Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and formally introduce you to the more than 22,500 museums and the nearly three-quarters of a million employees who work for them, across every state and district in the United States.

The U.S. museum community is robust and broad, including aquariums, arboreta, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, cultural museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, public gardens, science and technology centers, and zoos. In short, there is a museum that appeals to every person in this country.

Museums are economic engines. Economic impact data compiled by the American Alliance of Museums and Oxford Economics shows that this museum economy contributes \$50 billion a year to the U.S. economy, including through direct sales and by being key drivers of local tourism that support businesses and jobs far beyond the museum itself. Collectively, the museum sector generates \$12 billion in tax revenue to local, state, and federal governments. Museums also are vital local sources of employment, supporting 726,000 jobs annually. These jobs employ Americans throughout small towns and rural counties, mid-sized cities, and metropolitan areas.

Museums play an essential role in the nation's educational infrastructure, collectively spending more than \$2 billion a year on education, much of which is dedicated to career and workforce development and includes close partnerships with industry and corporations. Museums also work

closely with local and state school systems to provide high-quality learning experiences that align with and enhance local curriculum standards, they offer professional development for teachers—including in high-need areas like science and technology and emerging subjects like artificial intelligence—and they often run outreach and engagement programs to enhance classroom learning in rural and remote areas of some of our least populated states.

Finally, museums foster a sense of community, serving as pillars of civic life where people of all backgrounds can connect with knowledge, ideas, and each other. They provide gathering places and volunteer opportunities for countless senior citizens, serve as safe places for children and youth, and work alongside local partners to respond in times of crisis.

As you know, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the only federal agency whose primary mission is dedicated to providing resources and leadership for the museum sector. IMLS has long enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress, with members from both parties co-sponsoring IMLS authorizing legislation and voting for annual IMLS appropriations. One important reason for this bipartisan support is how efficiently IMLS operates, with the Office of Museum Services (OMS) administering \$55.5M in appropriations with less than 20 staff, who are a critical part of the approximately 75 staff at IMLS overall. The IMLS granting process for museums incorporates extensive review, is highly competitive, and ensures that projects benefit communities. Most OMS grants also require matching funds, which means that IMLS can provide unique cornerstone support that museums leverage as a multiplier for more local, philanthropic, and private sector monies that drive the museum's impact.

Museums are beloved institutions that have impressive support from the public. According to public opinion polling, 96% of Americans would think positively of their elected officials taking legislative action to support museums, regardless of political persuasion or community size. 97% of Americans view museums as educational assets, and 89% see that museums contribute important economic benefits to their community.

Our associations have a long track-record of working with IMLS leadership across presidential administrations, and we look forward to working with you in this role to support an agency and sector that is beloved by so many Americans. Similar to you, we are committed to efficiency and innovation in IMLS's essential role in supporting America's cultural infrastructure. We look forward to collaborating with IMLS to ensure that American museums continue to serve as dynamic centers of learning, where visitors of all ages and backgrounds can engage with our nation's heritage and shape our future direction.

We would greatly value the opportunity to meet with you to discuss your priorities and ideas, and to explore how we can collaborate to ensure continued federal support for museums.

Sincerely,

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