



**Testimony of Dr. Ford W. Bell, DVM
on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums to the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
in Support of Funding for
NEH, NEA, Smithsonian Institution, and Historic Preservation Programs
February 20, 2019**

Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Ford Bell and I am the immediate past President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). We urge your support for at least \$167.5 million each in Fiscal Year 2020 (FY 2020) funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), as well as sufficient funding for the Smithsonian Institution. We also request your support for the Historic Preservation Fund, including at least \$60 million for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), \$20 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and \$15 million for competitive grants to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement. We request funding of \$15 million for the Save America's Treasures program. In addition, we would like to work with you to explore ways to minimize the damage to our nation's museums from future government shutdowns.

Before detailing these funding priorities for the museum field, I want to express my appreciation for the increases enacted in FY 2019. The additional funds for the NEH, NEA, and historic preservation activities will enhance museums' work to enrich their communities and preserve our many heritages. The Subcommittee's choice to make these investments in FY 2019 speaks volumes about its commitment to our nation's cultural institutions. AAM remains deeply troubled by continuous proposals from the current Administration to slash many of these priorities, and we look forward to working with you—our bipartisan allies—to reject them.

Representing more than 35,000 museum professionals and volunteers, institutions—including aquariums, art museums, botanic gardens, children's museums, cultural museums, historic sites, history museums, maritime museums, military museums, natural history museums, planetariums, presidential libraries, science and technology centers, and zoos—and corporate partners serving the museum field, the Alliance stands for the broad range of the museum community.

Museums are essential in their communities for many reasons:

- 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. The economic activity of museums generates more than \$12 billion in tax revenue, one-third of it going to state and local governments. For example, the total financial impact that museums have on the economy in the state of Minnesota is \$917 million, including supporting 13,781 jobs. For Ohio it is a \$1.54 billion impact supporting 25,973 jobs. This impact is not limited to cities: more than 25% of museums are in rural areas. The import of these data is not the numbers alone – but the point that museums give back tremendously to their communities in numerous ways – including economically. The federal funding for NEA, NEH, and the other programs does not stay in

Washington, DC, but it goes back to communities across the nation. And it is leveraged many times by private philanthropy, and state and local investments.

- Museums are key education providers. Museums spend more than \$2 billion yearly on education activities; the typical museum devotes 75% of its education budget to K-12 students, and museums receive approximately 55 million visits each year from students in school groups. Children who visited a museum during kindergarten had higher achievement scores in reading, math and science in third grade than children who did not, including children most at risk for delays in achievement. Recent rigorous studies of single-visit field trips to art museums around the country found that participating students demonstrated greater knowledge of and interest in art, but also scored higher than peers in measures of critical thinking, empathy, tolerance, and comfort with multiple viewpoints about works of art. Museums help teach the state and local curriculum in subjects ranging from art and science to history, civics, and government. Museums have long served as a vital resource to homeschool learners. It is not surprising that in a 2017 public opinion survey, 97% of respondents agreed that museums were educational assets in their communities. The results were statistically identical regardless of political persuasion or community size.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1965. Grants are awarded to nonprofit educational institutions—including museums, colleges, universities, archives, and libraries—for educational programming and the care of collections. NEH supports museums as institutions of lifelong learning and exploration, and as keepers of our cultural, historical, and scientific heritages that can foster critical dialogues on challenging issues of our time.

In FY 2018, as a whole, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded 826 grants totaling more than \$67 million to institutions across the U.S., including museums. Many of NEH's divisions and offices support museums:

- The Division of Public Programs offers grants that bring the ideas and insights of the humanities to life in museums by supporting exhibitions, community conversations, and place-based history. Additionally, Positions in the Public Humanities supplements provide professional development opportunities for new museums professionals.
- The Division of Preservation and Access provides funding to museums for efforts to preserve and provide access to our nation's rich cultural heritage.
- The Division of Education Programs supports programs that bring educators to museums for intensive summer training programs on humanities topics.
- The Office of Digital Humanities offers grants to support innovations in technology at museums, universities, and other institutions.
- The Office of Challenge Grants offers matching grants to support much needed capacity building and infrastructure projects at museums.
- The Division of Research supports scholarly research that many museums use to inform exhibitions and public programming.

In calendar year 2018, 218 NEH-funded permanent and traveling exhibitions were open around the nation, providing life-long learning opportunities to a wide public audience. Humanities councils in every state and U.S. territory sponsor family literacy programs, speakers' bureaus, cultural heritage tourism, exhibitions, and live performances. In 2018, 55 state councils

supported 2,389 exhibitions, 10,097 discussion events, 166 preservation projects, and 769 local history programs. In total, all state council programs reached an audience of more than 137 million people. State councils also awarded more than 3,000 grants to partners in their communities.

Here are just two examples of how NEH funding was used to support museums' work in your communities:

- The Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, MN, received a \$600,000 award to implement a traveling exhibition, a website, and public programs examining the history of World War I and its impact on America that opened at the museum in 2017 and now is touring nationally.
- The Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, OH, received \$5,900 in 2015 to conduct a preservation assessment of the museum's works on paper, which include pieces by artists such as Winslow Homer, Albert Bierstadt, Mary Cassatt, Edward Hopper, Ben Shahn, Jacob Lawrence, Jasper Johns, Chuck Close, and Thomas Hart Benton.

The National Endowment for the Arts makes art accessible to all and provides leadership in arts education. Established in 1965, NEA supports great art in every congressional district. Its grants to museums help them exhibit, preserve, and interpret visual material through exhibitions, residencies, publications, commissions, public art works, conservation, documentation, services to the field, and public programs.

Since 2010, the National Endowment for the Arts has collaborated with Blue Star Families and the U.S. Department of Defense on Blue Star Museums, a program which provides free museum admission to active duty military and their families all summer long. In 2018, more than 2,000 museums in all 50 states participated, reaching on average more than 900,000 military members and their families.

In 2018, the National Endowment for the Arts provided more than 100 awards directly to museums, totaling more than \$3.73 million. The Arts Endowment's report, *U.S. Trends in Arts Attendance and Literary Reading: 2002-2017*, notes that in 2017, 23.7 percent of U.S. adults (57.5 million people) visited an art museum or gallery. That share of adults represents an increase of 12.9 percent from 2012 to 2017. Attendance rates were helped by increases among: African Americans, 18-24 year-olds, 35-44 year-olds, and adults who received only "some college" education. Communities' demands on museums continue to climb, increasing pressure to serve more people with limited financial and human resources. Receiving a grant from the NEA confers prestige on supported projects, strengthening museums' ability to attract matching funds from other public and private funders. On average, each dollar awarded by the Arts Endowment leverages up to nine dollars from other public and private sources. The federal role of the National Endowment for the Arts is uniquely valuable. No other funder—public or private—funds the arts in every state and the U.S. territories. Forty percent of NEA's grant funds are distributed to state arts agencies for re-granting.

Here are two examples of how NEA funding was used to support museums' work in your communities:

- The Minnesota Museum of American Art in St. Paul, MN, received \$33,000 in 2018 to support the exhibition, *A Nation of One*, featuring the multimedia practice of artist Brad

Kahlhamer that incorporates materials and symbolism from Native America cultures. This will be the first solo survey of this nationally significant artist's work in the Upper Midwest.

- The Cleveland Museum of Art in Cleveland, OH, received \$40,000 in 2017 to support a research project designed to answer questions and assess assumptions about how new visitor engagement technology expands the relationship visitors have with the collection, how best to measure it, and its effect on the attendance figures of new visitors and millennials.

In addition to these direct grants, NEA's Arts and Artifacts Indemnity program also allows museums to apply for federal indemnity on major exhibitions, saving them as much as \$30 million in insurance costs every year and making many more exhibitions available to the public—all at virtually no cost to the American taxpayer.

The Smithsonian Institution comprises some of the most visited museums in the world. The National Museum of African American History and Culture has captivated audiences from around the globe, underscoring the power of our national museums to educate and inspire. We support funding increases that would allow these world-class museums to undertake critical collections care, make needed technology upgrades, conduct cutting edge research of every type, and increase access for all.

The Historic Preservation Fund is the funding source of preservation awards to states, tribes, local governments, and nonprofits. State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices carry out the historic preservation work of the federal government on state and tribal lands. These duties include making nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, reviewing the impact of federal projects, providing assistance to developers seeking a rehabilitation tax credit, working with local preservation commissions, and conducting preservation education and planning. This federal-state-local foundation of America's historic preservation program was established by the National Historic Preservation Act. Historic preservation programs are not only essential to protecting our many heritages; they also serve as economic development engines and job creators. We urge you to provide \$60 million for SHPOs and \$20 million for THPOs.

We applaud recent funding for the Save America's Treasures program, and urge you to provide \$15 million in FY 2020 funding. From 1999 to 2010, total federal funding of \$315 million for 1,287 Save America's Treasures projects leveraged an additional \$400 million in non-federal funds, and created more than 16,000 jobs nationwide. These projects protected some of America's most iconic and endangered artifacts, including the American flag that inspired the *Star Spangled Banner*.

We also applaud the investment in competitive grants to preserve the sites and stories of the Civil Rights Movement. Grants for this initiative are currently helping museums and historic sites around the country conserve endangered structures, document stories, and share resources with the public. We support FY 2020 funding of \$15 million for these Civil Rights Movement grants.

I hope that my testimony helped make it clear why these priorities are of critical importance to the nation and how they provide a worthwhile return on investment to the American taxpayer.

Thank you.