



**Testimony of Amy Templeton, President & CEO, McWane Science Center,
on behalf of the 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
March 23, 2023**

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Amy Templeton, and I am President and CEO of the McWane Science Center in Birmingham, Alabama, testifying on behalf 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) 2024, a much-needed increase of at least \$10 million accounting for inflation and public need for museum services. In light of museums being banned from this year's House Community Project Funding, which we strongly oppose, increasing funding for competitive grants for museums is all the more critical.

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.

I want to express the museum field's gratitude for the \$55.5 million in funding for OMS in FY 2023, and we applaud the bipartisan group of 136 Representatives who wrote to you in support of OMS funding.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, OMS provided critical leadership to the museum community. Its Communities for Immunity partnership is working to boost COVID-19 vaccine confidence and access in communities across the country.

Museums are a robust and diverse business sector, including African American museums, 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 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 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 decided through 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.

In FY 2022, Congress provided \$268 million to IMLS, of which \$47.6 million was directed to the Office of Museum Services. With this funding, OMS provided 280 grants totaling \$44.6 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 2022 OMS received 716 applications requesting more than \$109 million, but current funding has allowed the agency to fund only a small fraction of the highly rated grant applications it receives. \$65.5 million in FY 2024 funding would allow OMS to increase its grant capacity for museums, funds which museums will need to help recover from the pandemic and continue to serve their communities. This funding increase would still be greatly shy of the high demand of \$109 million in highly rated grant applications the agency received in FY 2022.

The pandemic has inflicted profound damage on US museums, the vast majority of which are 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organizations. The museum field will take years to recover to pre-pandemic levels of staffing, revenue, and attendance. Thanks to several federal relief programs, far fewer museums than initially expected are in danger of permanent closure and tens of thousands of jobs were saved. While federal relief funding has provided critical lifelines, museums are still struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels of support. Despite the tremendous financial and psychological stress caused by the pandemic, museum professionals demonstrated the critical role museums play in our country's infrastructure and deepened their social impact in their communities. Museums are essential community infrastructure.

Here are examples from the McWane Science Center of how OMS helps museums better serve the public: In 2019, McWane received a grant in the amount of \$134,452 to strengthen the science engagement experiences within our museum. The grant allowed our education staff and core volunteers to become Certified Interpretive Guides through the National Association of Interpretation, and to create a novel and defined science engagement framework to support visitor interaction and learning. The grant led to a complete reformatting of our engagement and interpretation activities and the development of new programs and exhibitions to allow our visitors to learn more and relate that new knowledge to their own everyday experiences.

In 2021, we received an OMS grant in the amount of \$221,740 for the planning and design of a new permanent exhibit and education program called “Dropping Science” that encourages visitors to use STEM principles for creative and expressive interactions inspired by the hip-hop cultural movement. There is an enormous amount of STEM in hip-hop, including math in the rhythms and beats, and technology and engineering in the manipulation of electronic devices to create new musical instruments. In addition to teaching STEM principles, we believe this exhibit will help to broaden and diversify our audiences, providing greater exposure to STEM among underrepresented science center visitors, including people of color and older teens and young adults. The planning of this exhibit has facilitated multiple community conversations and partnerships, including an advisory group of local hip-hop artists and producers, and collaboration with organizations that are using hip-hop as a basis for educational programs in schools and community centers.

This grant is an excellent example of how OMS supports and encourages exploration and development of new ideas and creative innovations. Funding was provided for the planning of exhibit content, development of a formal evaluation plan, exhibit prototyping, and a final exhibit

design plan. These elements are crucial in bringing projects from an idea to a reality, but they are often hard to fund through the private sector. The activities supported by OMS have allowed us to progress to a point where private funds are now being committed, forming a true public/private partnership that will benefit our museum and the community we serve.

Also in 2021, McWane Science Center received an OMS grant through the American Rescue Plan in the amount of \$35,567 to support educational initiatives for the 2021-2022 school year. Initiatives included developing and implementing school-based outreach programs, virtual programming, teacher workshops, and classroom resources. This funding enabled us to deliver outreach programs to more than 12,000 children. We also created and presented professional development programs for early childhood teachers from pre-K to early elementary school, serving nearly 300 teachers during the school year. This funding was also used to develop STEM kits for a variety of grade levels that can be checked out by teachers and used in their classrooms. The grant helped us use lessons learned during the pandemic to fully develop an expanded educational delivery model, including digital programming as a staple in addition to in-person services.

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, and families they serve.

In closing, I highlight recent [national public opinion polling](#) that shows that 95% 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. If I can provide any additional information, I would be delighted to do so. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.