

Statement of  
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Chairman Coburn, Senator Carper and distinguished members of the subcommittee, the American Association of Museums (AAM) appreciates the opportunity to testify for your hearing on *Museums and Federal Funding*.

Founded in 1906, AAM is dedicated to promoting excellence within the museum community. We currently have more than 20,000 members, including nearly 14,000 individual members, more than 3,100 museums. We are the only national organization that serves the entire scope of the museum community. Our individual and institutional members represent museums of art, history, science, military and maritime museums, children's museums as well as aquariums, zoos, botanical gardens, arboretums, historic sites, planetariums, and science and technology centers. The services we provide the field benefit the entire field, not just our members. Through representation, professional education, accreditation and guidance on how to achieve current professional standards of performance, AAM helps museum staffs, boards and volunteers across the country serve the public.

At the foundation of our association's service to museums is our role as a forum for ongoing discussion about the development and measurement of museum performance across our field. AAM's Museum Assessment Program (MAP) and Accreditation program are respected within the field of museums and by other charitable and philanthropic communities for our role in strengthening museums' capacity and in recognizing excellence in operations and public service.

For 25 years, AAM has worked with Institute of Museum and Library Services to help museums reach their full potential through the Museum Assessment Program. Museums of all types and sizes have participated in the program to attain excellence in operations. The program offers four assessments:

- **Institutional Assessment:** Assessing overall operations and planning
- **Collections Management Assessment:** Focuses on collections issues as they relate to overall museum operations
- **Public Dimension Assessment:** Evaluates how well a museum serves, collaborates with, and is valued by its community
- **Governance Assessment:** Working with the museum's board to examine its structure, roles and responsibilities, and performance

These assessments provide museums an outside peer review of their operations; recognition of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement, and an introduction to a formal assessment process similar to AAM's Accreditation program. MAP has served museums in all fifty states.

Many museums that participate in the MAP program subsequently pursue accreditation. Accreditation from AAM is recognition of a museum's commitment to excellence, accountability, the highest professional standards and continued institutional improvement. AAM's Accreditation program is more than 30 years old. Accreditation of a museum is a recognized seal of approval that brings national recognition to a museum, regardless of its size or location. The program strengthens individual institutions, and improves the profession as a whole by promoting ethical and professional practices that enable museum leadership to make informed decisions, allocate and use resources wisely, and remain accountable to the public. The program has served as the field's primary vehicle for quality assurance and self-regulation. AAM accredited museums are located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico and include institutions of all types and sizes.

So what is a typical museum? There is no one mold from which a museum is cast. Museums in America reflect the diversity of our communities and range from the largest art museums and zoos to the smallest of our historic homes or a children's museum in a shopping mall. Wealthy industrialists, collectors, educators, scientists, parents and patriotic citizens have founded museums. The earliest museum predates the founding of the United States. In 1773, the Charleston Library Society gathered samples of animals, plants and minerals from the South Carolina low country and this collection formed the foundation of the first American museum. There are in excess of 15,000 museums in the United States.

Museum budgets range from several hundreds of millions to a few thousand dollars. They are primarily nonprofit organizations with the largest portion of their budgets – 35 percent – funded through the generous philanthropy

of private citizens, businesses, and foundations. They get additional support from earned revenue (31 percent), investment income (11 percent), and funding from local, state and the federal government (25 percent) through competitive grants, direct appropriations, or special tax revenues. State and local governments contribute by far the largest portion of government funding to museums. Within the charitable community, museums have one of the most diversified sources of income.

Museums along with other charities face a challenging and competitive fundraising environment. The most recent data available from Independent Sector shows that the charitable sector has grown from 739,000 organizations in 1977 to 1.19 million organizations in 1997. In addition, charities that provide social services are seeing a decline in spending for health and human services at all levels of government. To make up for government shortfalls, social service organizations are turning to the private sector. In my view, communities are exceeding their capacity to support the charitable organizations in their community. The ongoing expansion of the charitable sector increases the number of charities seeking the same donor dollars and the costs of fundraising are escalating.

In competing for funding, museums must dispel the many myths that surround their operations and finances. Several years ago, AAM conducted a research study to understand the public's views of museums. We learned that the public believes that museums are primarily funded by government. In reality, as I noted previously, museums are funded primarily through private contributions and earned income. Another misunderstanding about museums surrounds the ownership of museum collections. The staff, or director, or the trustees do not own the collections in museums – the public does. Museums act on behalf of the public as stewards of natural and cultural heritage and develop programs and activities around the collections to educate and inspire the public.

At the heart of every museum is the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the world around us, our past and what will be our future. We are the only institutions that collect, preserve, display, interpret and educate for the public. We are stewards of who and what we are today, and have been in the past. From the beginning, museums have played an important role in public education serving our youngest learners to our senior citizens. From their earliest days, museums have worked with teachers on how to use their resources to help students engage with history, science, nature and art. Today, museums spend in excess of \$1 billion annually in support of K-12 education.

In fact, the percentage of museums' median annual operating budgets spent on educational programming has increased four-fold just since 1996. With more than 18 million instructional hours in 2000-01, museums are offering a broad range of services to schools. They are key partners in developing

curriculum, providing professional development for teachers, and offering direct services to students through visits to museums, classroom visits by museum educators, and Web based educational materials and programs. In a number of communities, students attend schools in museums operated jointly by museum and school district staff.

The commitment of museums to education does not end with their ties to formal education. Museums are also places of lifelong learning. They provide an environment rich with opportunity for intergenerational learning and sharing where children, their parents, and their grandparents can work together to connect ideas and experiences in direct, vivid and meaningful ways. Museum visitors can come to know the struggles and accomplishments of different cultures and unfamiliar people and achieve a deeper understanding of their own families, neighborhoods, the country in which they live, and the world.

Museums do not undertake this educational responsibility without an equal commitment to the care, protection and preservation of our nation's heritage. There are more than 750 million objects and living specimens being held in the public trust by American museums. This number grows as museums continue to acquire the material patrimony of our civilization and to assure that this cultural heritage remains publicly available for generations to come. A rough estimate places the annual expenditure for the care of those public collections at \$1.1 billion. The need for conservation is substantial and ongoing. These costs will continue to grow with time as collections expand and age.

Museums also play a key role in community identity. Museums have deeply rooted and unique connections with their communities. Their buildings are city landmarks. Visiting the local museums is a shared community experience as destinations for school field trips or weekend family outings to learn about, appreciate and connect with treasured artifacts and collections.

Our museums serve as forums and safe places to talk about issues of concern to the community. This capacity is at the center of how museums are helping people understand current events in a broader historical and cultural context. For example, within three months after the riots in its community in April 2001, the Cincinnati Museum Center mounted *Civil Unrest in Cincinnati: Voices of Our Community*, a display on the history of civil unrest in Cincinnati. The exhibition helped citizens better understand the civil unrest precipitated by a recent event in which a policeman shot and killed an unarmed African American youth.

This spirit was also reflected in the response of America's museums to the events of September 11, 2001. People across the nation gathered at museums to seek solace. Museums also helped with community fundraising efforts and blood drives for those citizens who wanted to contribute to the victims of 9/11.

And a year later communities came together at museums to remember the tragic events through patriotic celebrations, memorial services, and special exhibitions. In Texas, the Sam Rayburn House coordinated community observances that included an organized effort by local churches to provide potluck suppers to local firefighters and police.

Museum leaders are also working with local officials and business leaders to create vibrant communities, which are attractive to businesses and tourists. Quality of life is a key ingredient to attracting and retaining businesses in a community. Across the country, museums are a key part of redevelopment and development efforts by cities and towns. In 2003, voters in Tulsa, Oklahoma approved a one-penny county sales tax increase for regional economic development and capital improvements for Vision 2025. Among the projects approved by voters in Vision 2025 are the Oklahoma Aquarium, Tulsa Air and Space Museum, American Indian Cultural Center, Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame, and Mohawk Park, which includes the Tulsa Zoo and Oxley Nature Center.

Convention and visitor bureaus across the country highlight their local museums among the key assets in attracting visitors, conventions and conferences. According to the Travel Industry Association, travel and tourism is a \$1.3 trillion industry and one of the United States largest employers. TIA also notes that museums are among the leading tourist destinations and nearly half of travelers on journeys of 50 miles or more visit at least one cultural, art or historic venue, including museums.

With the multiple roles our museums play in American society today, there is an important place for financial support from all levels of government, including the federal government. Unlike our counterparts in most of the rest of the world, our nation's patrimony is held not by the government, but by its citizens. The government is also not the primary financial support with the majority of support contributed by private donors. In most other countries, the government bears the sole financial responsibility for support its country's museums. The United States supports its museums through a unique private-public partnership. We fully support continuing that tradition. We need the federal government to continue its commitment to ensuring our museums have the capacity to operate in the best interests of all our citizens. Federal programs, like those represented here today by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and National Science Foundation and others such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, are key partners in providing our citizens access to lifelong learning opportunities in our nation's museums.

For 30 years, the Institute of Museum and Library Services has served to advance the professionalism of our field and promote innovation in public service. Museums in all settings, country and rural, urban and suburban and the citizens of these communities have benefited from the programs of IMLS. These

investments in our nation's museums consistently pay off. In Fiscal Year 2005, the agency's largest program, Museums for America awarded nearly \$17 million to 169 museums. The museums matched these awards with more than \$32 million in privately raised funds.

The National Science Foundation and the museum community have worked together for 22 years through the Informal Science Education program to promote public understanding of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The NSF Informal Science Education program works with museums to help students, educators, parents and the public to design learning experiences that increase interest, engagement and understanding in STEM. This investment is critical as policymakers, educators and the business community seek to improve K-12 learning in science and mathematics. Science museums are a key player in inspiring youth to pursue a future in science by providing self-directed and hands on learning experiences.

As our organization celebrates 100 years of service to museums, we have been reflecting on the value that museums bring to our society. We believe our core values remain the protection and preservation of our collections and promoting lifelong learning in our society. There are numerous anecdotes and stories our museums can share about the ways in which they have inspired countless schoolchildren to become scientists, historians, artists, and productive citizens in our democratic society. We need the federal government as partners to ensure these opportunities remain available for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.