Testimony in Support of FY 2024 Funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services

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Submitted by:
Gil Nelson, Ph.D.
President, Natural Science Collections Alliance
1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 420, Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-628-1500, E-mail: jpandey@aibs.org

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Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

The Natural Science Collections Alliance appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of fiscal year (FY) 2024 appropriations for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). **We encourage Congress to provide robust funding for the IMLS in FY 2024, with at least $65.5 million for its Office of Museum Services**.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a non-profit association that supports natural science collections, their human resources, the institutions that house them, and their research activities for the benefit of science and society. Our membership consists of institutions that are part of an international network of museums, botanical gardens, herbaria, universities, and other institutions that contain natural science collections and use them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities.

Museums strengthen our national economy. They provide core educational and outreach programs to engage the public and contribute more than $50 billion to the U.S. economy every year, support more than 726,000 American jobs, and generate $12 billion in tax revenue. Museums also play an essential role in the nation's educational infrastructure, spending more than $2 billion a year on education. It is of paramount importance to invest in museums given the enormous economic and educational contributions of these institutions.

IMLS provides funding that helps museums with public outreach programs and strengthens the capacity of museums to improve the well-being of their communities. Its Office of Museum Services (OMS) awards grants to museums for preserving and digitizing collections, educational programming, professional development, and community outreach. In addition to providing grants, the agency conducts critical research, facilitates state and regional collaboration, and supports national initiatives that benefit museums.

Investments in IMLS and its efforts to support scientific and educational advances in science collections, such as those that comprise natural history museums, are in the national interest. Scientific collections contribute to improved public well-being and national economic security. This important documentation of our nation’s heritage is irreplaceable; it cannot be reconstructed or reassembled at a later date. Specimens collected decades or centuries ago are increasingly

used to develop and validate models that explain how species, including viruses, parasites, and pathogens have dispersed around the world, as well as how and when they might infect humans.

The IMLS is the primary federal agency that supports public education programs at museums and an important source of funding for preserving scientific collections. Investments in IMLS programs that support natural science collections research and education are essential if we are to maintain our global leadership in innovation.

Scientific collections enable us to tell the story of life on Earth. There are more than 1,600 biological collections in the United States, with a significant number of these constituting the research and education resources of our nation's natural history museums. These resources are the result of more than 200 years of scientific investigation, discovery, and inventory of living and fossil species. Scientists have collected, studied, and curated more than one billion specimens within those collections, many of which have now been digitized and the resulting data stored in easily accessible online databases that contribute heavily to research. The institutions that care for scientific collections are important research infrastructure for the United States that also provide students with hands-on training opportunities.

Natural science collections advance scientific research and education, and that informs actions to improve public health, agricultural productivity, natural resource management, biodiversity conservation, and American economic innovation and productivity. Current research involving natural science collections also contributes to the development of new cyberinfrastructure, data visualization tools, and improved data management practices. This work also ensures critical input into policy development and implementation by several U.S. government agencies. A few examples of how scientific collections have saved lives, enhanced food production, and advanced scientific discovery include:

- Scientists used museum specimens in U.S. collections to gather data on the distribution of the mosquito *Culex quadrofaciatus*, which is known to carry West Nile Virus and other pathogens. They then modeled the distribution under different scenarios of changing climates to predict regions where the species may expand in the future. Predicting the spread of disease vectors such as these mosquitoes helps the health care community prepare for disease outbreaks and where they will happen.

- Researchers from Boston University documented Tau proteins in the brains of fluid preserved museum specimens of Downy Woodpecker. These proteins are also found in traumatic brain injuries in humans. Because of the life history traits of woodpeckers, the researchers argue these birds may have evolved a level of resistance to traumatic head injuries that could have implications for treatments for humans.

- Citrus bacterial canker disease wreaks havoc on fruit crops in Florida. Using plant specimens collected a century ago, scientists have analyzed the bacterium and traced its source. Knowledge of how the bacteria spreads allows scientists to develop effective control methods and to protect the U.S. citrus industry.

- When the 2001 anthrax attacks happened in the United States, specimens collected decades earlier allowed researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to quickly identify the strain involved.

In FY 2022, Congress provided $268 million to IMLS, of which $47.6 million was directed to OMS. With this funding, OMS provided 280 grants totaling $44.6 million to museums and related organizations in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. However, the demand for grant funding from OMS is significantly higher. In FY 2022, OMS received 716 applications requesting more than $109 million, but the agency could only fund a fraction of the highly rated grant applications it received. A budget of $65.5 million or more in FY 2024 would allow OMS to increase its grant capacity for museums.

Please support robust funding for IMLS in FY 2024, with at least $65.5 million for OMS, a much needed increase of at least $10 million accounting for inflation and public need for museum services.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request and for your prior support of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.