

**Testimony in Support of FY 2026 Funding for the
Institute of Museum and Library Services**

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Submitted by:

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House 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) 2026 appropriations for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). **We encourage Congress to provide sustained funding for the IMLS in FY 2026, with at least \$55.5 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, 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 programs that benefit students of all ages. It is of paramount importance to invest in museums given the enormous economic and educational contributions of these institutions.

National public polling [data](#) from the American Alliance of Museums has shown that Americans overwhelmingly appreciate and recognize the work of museums as educational and economic assets to their communities. Findings from the poll also showed that 96% of voters would approve of lawmakers who acted to support museums and 96% want federal funding for museums to be maintained or increased.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted U.S. museums, most of which are nonprofit organizations. While efforts are underway for recovery, it will take years to return to pre-pandemic levels of staffing, revenue, and attendance. Survey data from 2023 indicated that two-thirds of museums were still experiencing reduced attendance, with an average of 71% attendance compared to their pre-pandemic levels. Financial recovery has been inconsistent, with

some museums seeing decreases, increases, or no change in net operating performance compared to 2019. Despite the challenges faced during the pandemic, museums continued to fill gaps to meet local needs, demonstrating the critical role they play in our nation's infrastructure.

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. Throughout the pandemic, OMS provided critical leadership to the museum community through relief grants and evidence-based information about best practices to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among staff and visitors.

Investments in IMLS and its efforts to support scientific and educational advances in science collections 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 quadrofasciatus*, 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 fiscal year (FY) 2024, Congress allocated \$295 million to IMLS, with \$55.5 million designated for OMS. With this funding, OMS provided 293 grants totaling \$55 million to museums and related organizations in 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. However, the demand for grant funding from OMS is significantly higher. In FY 2024, OMS received 1,005 grant applications requesting more than \$203 million, yet could only fund 29% of these highly rated proposals. This stark gap demonstrates the urgent need for increased federal support to ensure museums can continue providing valuable services and opportunities to communities of all sizes across the United States.

We are deeply concerned about the March 14, 2025 Executive Order targeting the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for elimination to the maximum extent of the law. We are also concerned about the subsequent decision to place all IMLS staff under administrative leave. IMLS is a small but efficient agency, and arbitrary reductions in personnel will severely undermine its ability to fulfill its critical mission. It is imperative that IMLS retains the authority to manage its staffing needs to continue serving communities effectively. We urge Congress to ensure that its long-standing and bipartisan commitment to authorizing and appropriating funds to IMLS is not undermined by potential executive actions.

We ask that Congress provide sustained funding for IMLS in FY 2026. Please provide at least \$55.5 million for OMS, which is equal to FY 2024 enacted levels, and oppose any drastic budget and staffing cuts to the agency.

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