April X, 2020

The Honorable [*full* name of member of Congress]

United States House of Representatives / United States Senate

Address

Washington, D.C. xxxxx

**RE: Phase 4 Aid for Museums Impacted by Coronavirus**

Dear Representative / Senator [*last* name of your member of Congress],

The nation’s museum community is facing an existential threat from the closures required to address the COVID-19 pandemic that requires major responses from the United States Congress beyond those contained in legislation enacted prior to April 1. Most museums anticipate remaining closed for many more weeks and months and the impact of the pandemic will be felt through the end of 2020 and beyond. Normal revenue from admissions fees, retail sales, and event rentals have effectively ceased, and charitable contributions have declined dramatically. Nationwide, our museums are losing at least $33 million a day due to closures as a result of COVID-19 and are in desperate need of significant Federal support to maintain jobs, secure our cultural heritage, help to rebuild our nation’s tourism industry – and simply to survive the months to come.

[Brief description of your mission, the impact of this crisis on your institution, and any activities you continue to do to support your local community.]

As you develop phase 4 COVID-19 response and recovery legislation, we urge you to:

1. **Extend the Paycheck Protection Program and loan forgiveness through December 2020, and make nonprofits, including museums, with greater than 500 employees eligible for loan forgiveness**. Priority number one is to keep as many employees in their jobs as possible for as long as possible. Nonprofit museums, including those with greater than 500 employees, often employ large numbers of part-time and temporary employees, including students, as part of delivering their public outreach and education missions.
2. **Include supplemental funding, specifically for museums, to be administered by the Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to cover needs not filled by the Paycheck Protection Program**. This would include assisting museums in developing and sharing distance learning content and pandemic recovery planning and implementation. If the Paycheck Protection Program is inadequate to meet the needs of the museum community or is not renewed and forgiveness not extended for nonprofits, including museums, through December 2020, then the supplemental funding would need to include $6 billion in funding specifically for museums’ general operating support and payroll for the IMLS – Office of Museum Services.
   * NOTE: The $6 billion figure is a conservative estimate based on an Oxford Economics / AAM study, “[Museums as Economic Engines](https://www.aam-us.org/2018/01/19/museums-as-economic-engines/),” which found that the U.S. museum field directly employs 372,100 people and generates $15.9 billion in income for American citizens each year. Therefore, museums will need to spend $1.3 billion each month to keep 370,000 people employed. Subtracting the two months of expected assistance from SBA-related loan programs, U.S. museums will need $6 billion to retain their staff from through December 2020.
3. **Expand the universal charitable deduction provision** in the CARES Act by removing the $300 cap.
4. **Extend the CARES Act removal of the 60% limit on Adjusted Gross Income that may be deducted** through charitable gifts of cash.
5. Explore potential legislation that would **mandate that business interruption policies cover COVID claims**, and that the federal government would 100% reinsure the claims.
6. **Include nonprofit museums** in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee’s $760 billion “Moving Forward Framework” aspects of the legislation for pandemic- related health and safety infrastructure upgrades and energy efficient retrofits.

The nonprofit museum community is a robust and diverse business sector, including African American museums, aquariums, arboreta, art museums, botanic gardens, children’s museums, cultural 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. The requests above are shared by nine national museum associations including the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), the Association of Children’s Museums (ACM), the Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), the American Public Gardens Association (APGA), the Association of Science Museum Directors (ASMD), and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

**More About the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Museums**

As we write this letter, museums of all sizes are experiencing closures, an almost complete elimination of earned revenue, canceled events, and a growing number of furloughs and layoffs. This is escalating, day-by-day, as closures and cancellations continue and extend. Most museums are cash-based businesses; their economic lifeblood is people visiting. Even once limited reopening may be possible, declines in international and domestic tourism, significant impact on local attendance, and increases in physical distancing, and concerns about hands-on activities, will have a devastating and lasting impact on the nonprofit museum community, which operates on thin margins of financial sustainability, without large designated operational reserve funds or access to tax-relief benefits, and is often largely dependent on earned revenue from visitors passing through their doors. AAM estimates that as many as 30% of museums, mostly in small and rural communities, will not be able to re-open without significant additional and immediate emergency financial assistance beyond the CARES Act.

Furloughs and layoffs among museum personnel are increasing. As employers, museums care deeply about the welfare, health, and financial stability of hard-working staff, and are concerned that increasing unemployment among museum personnel may exacerbate broader community issues such as lack of access to health care, food insecurity, and even homelessness that will make the COVID-19 response that much more challenging.

**The Value of Museums to Nation and Local Communities**

Museums have impressive support from the public. According to a 2017 public opinion poll conducted by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of AAM, 96% of Americans would think positively of their elected officials’ taking legislative action to support museums, regardless of political persuasion or community size. Ninety-seven percent of Americans believe that museums are educational assets, and 89% believe that museums contribute important economic benefits to their community. Museums are also the most trusted source of information in America, rated higher than local papers, nonprofit researchers, the U.S. government, or academic researchers. Museums can leverage this high level of public trust to provide reliable education on COVID-19 and fight misinformation about its spread. By empowering the public with the information they need to make informed decisions and lower their risk of contracting or spreading disease, museums can help sustain healthy communities, maintain calm, and reduce the chances for an increase in discrimination or xenophobia often created by global diseases.

Even now, while museums are experiencing closures significant losses in revenue and declines in staffing, they are still serving an increase in demand in communities across the United States for educational resources by providing lesson plans, online learning opportunities, and “drop-off” learning kits to teachers and parents in areas where schools have closed; freely sharing virtual exhibitions and content accessible to those who are otherwise isolated; creating new digital services; maintaining their outdoor spaces to provide quiet places to relieve stress during this time of high anxiety; providing personal protective equipment to healthcare workers; and supporting the families of health care workers and first responders with access to child care and meals. Museums are community anchors that develop innovative responses to community needs through enduring relationships with a range of partners, including school districts, youth-serving nonprofits, community-based organizations, public libraries, local businesses, and more.

Museums are also economic engines. Economic impact data compiled by AAM and Oxford Economics shows that this museum economy contributes $50 billion a year to the U.S. economy and generates $12 billion in tax revenue to local, state, and federal governments. Museums also are vital local sources of employment, supporting 726,000 direct and indirect jobs annually. Museums play an essential role in the nation’s educational infrastructure, spending more than $2 billion a year on education. The destabilizing effects of the current crisis place the future of these contributions to the U.S. economy and education system at great risk. If these businesses fail during this crisis, then there will be no jobs to which many thousands of displaced workers can return.

Both the recovery of our nation from this emergency—and longer-term efforts to advance public health and scientific research to prevent and minimize the impact of future similar events—depend on engaging the public in scientific issues and inspiring students to pursuing STEM careers. Science and technology centers and museums, in particular, are critical to this future, and we urge you to ensure that these community-based organizations remain vibrant and able to resume their mission to engage, inspire, and increase public understanding of the science that underpins successful responses to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Title

Your Address

Your City, State, Zip

Your Phone Number

Your Website