

**Outside Witness Testimony**

**Christofer Nelson, President and CEO, Association of Science and Technology Centers;  
Arthur G. Affleck, III, Executive Director, Association of Children's Museums; and  
Bonnie Styles, Executive Director, Association of Science Museum Directors**

**to the**

**United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

**regarding**

**Federal Science Funding and the National Institutes of Health,  
Institute of Museum and Library Services, and U.S. Department of Education**

**May 18, 2023**

Dear Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for accepting this statement submitted by the Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), the Association of Children's Museums (ACM), and the Association of Science Museum Directors (ASMD). We are the membership organizations for science and technology centers and museums, for children's museums, and for science and natural history museum leaders. Our networks of several hundred institutions in all 50 states, and in nearly 50 countries around the world, traditionally engage almost 100 million people annually in the United States. Our members and their institutions serve as community hubs for increased understanding of and engagement with science and technology among all people, and specifically serving the needs and interests of children by providing exhibits and programs that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning.

Our place-based organizations are leading institutions in the efforts to promote education in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) through the development of rich, innovative, and effective science-learning experiences. We are helping to create the country's future STEAM workforce and inspiring people of all ages about the wonders and meaning of science in their lives. Our members are trusted and valued by their communities—and a recent national public opinion poll showed that museums are among the most trusted sources of information across the political spectrum, second only to friends and family—above nonprofit organizations generally, local and national news organizations, government, business, and social media ([Museums and Trust](#), AAM and Wilkening Consulting, 2021).

As trusted place-based institutions, our members serve essential roles in convening their communities, advancing action on issues of local and national concern, and engaging individuals of all ages in science and technology.

## ASTC, ACM, and ASMD Requests for Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

We appreciate the support that the Subcommittee has provided for the nation's science and education agencies, including support for programs of particular interest to ASTC, ACM, and ASMD.

In general, we stress the need for inclusive programs that include support for informal education, as much STEAM learning—including but not limited to school-aged youth—happens outside of formal schooling. Research has consistently shown that learning experiences outside of the formal classroom are vitally important to youth's future interest and capacity in STEAM (National Academies, [2009](#), [2010](#), [2015](#), [2016](#)).

### *National Institutes of Health*

The Science Education Partnership Awards (SEPA) program builds relationships between the biomedical research community and educational organizations—including science centers and museums, children's museums, and natural history museums—that improve life science literacy. In addition, there is growing awareness of the importance of public engagement as a core aspect of several major initiatives that intersect with societal interests and public concerns, such as the BRAIN Initiative and the All of Us Research Program.

We strongly urge the Subcommittee to appropriate **at least \$25 million for the Science Education Partnership Awards (SEPA)**, based at the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS).

In addition, we encourage language that supports incorporating public engagement with science as an element of NIH funding programs more widely, including especially for initiatives that have significant public impact.

### *Institute of Museum and Library Services*

As the primary federal agency supporting all types of museums, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) provides critical funding to museums through the Office of Museum Services (OMS)—as well as to libraries and to tribal and other cultural institutions. This includes crucial resources for informal science activities at science centers and museums throughout the country.

The current appropriations level has allowed OMS to fund only a small fraction of the grant applications received that have been rated highly by peer reviewers. Increased funding for OMS would allow the office to increase its grant capacity for museums, funds which museums will need to continue to recover from the pandemic and continue to serve their communities.

We urge you to provide **at least \$65.5 million for the Office of Museum Services** at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

We also ask the Subcommittee to include funding for the agency to continue to strengthen the structural support for a museum Grants to States program administered by OMS, as

authorized by the Museum and Library Services Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 9173(a)(4), *in addition* to the agency’s current direct grants to museums. Unlike state library grants, IMLS does not currently have the ability to rapidly deploy resources for addressing state-defined needs and expand the reach of museums and enhance their ability to serve their communities.

### *Department of Education*

The U.S. Department of Education has significant opportunity to complement its expanding support for schools and school systems—with concurrent support for out-of-school learning include summer, afterschool, and informal education.

The pandemic has shown how important robust afterschool and summer learning programs are to working families and our most vulnerable students, and how vital resources are to support these programs to ensure they are available and effective for the children and youth who need them.

Specifically, we request that you support an **increase of \$750 million for the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers** program in FY 2024, which would bring the budget to \$2.09 billion.

We continue to thank the Subcommittee for all its support of a robust science and education budget. You have demonstrated your support for crucial programs that promote STEAM education for our nation’s students. Like our organizations, you recognize these are vital investments in our future, and we thank you in advance for taking action accordingly. Our three organizations—along with the broader museum community—stand ready to be of service to your work. We are always happy to provide examples of the ways that museums are contributing to their communities and helping to advance local, regional, and national priorities. With our networks of hundreds of community-based institutions, these examples can be in or near each Congressional district.

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Founded in 1973, the **Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC)** is a network of nearly 700 science and technology centers and museums, and allied organizations, engaging more than 110 million people annually across North America and in almost 50 countries. With its members and partners, ASTC works towards a vision of increased understanding of—and engagement with—science and technology among all people. [www.astc.org](http://www.astc.org)

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The **Association of Children's Museums (ACM)** champions children's museums worldwide. With more than 450 members in 50 states and 12 countries, ACM leverages the collective knowledge of children's museums through convening, sharing, and dissemination. [www.childrensmuseums.org](http://www.childrensmuseums.org)

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The **Association of Science Museum Directors (ASMD)** is a non-profit, professional association of over 75 natural history and science museum directors across the country. Our community of museum leaders provides a leading voice for science and science museums in the public sphere and addresses issues related to the advancement of our respective organizations to benefit society and the planet. [www.asmd-us.org](http://www.asmd-us.org)

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