

Testimony of

Christine Fowler Shearer,  
Director, Massillon Museum  
Massillon, OH

on behalf of the American Association of Museums  
Washington, DC

Presented to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
March 30, 2006 at 2:00 p.m.

on the Fiscal Year 2007 Funding for  
The Office of Museum Services at the Institute of Museum and Library Services

**Witness:** Christine Fowler Shearer, Director  
Massillon Museum, Massillon, OH

**Date:** March 30, 2006 at 2:00 p.m.

**Testimony Summary:** The American Association of Museums (AAM) is pleased to testify behalf of the Fiscal Year 2007 budget of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). AAM is the national service organization that works to enhance the value of all museums to their communities through leadership, advocacy and service. My own museum is an accredited member of the association. We are an integral part of our community's cultural activity and serve as a center of learning for the public.

One of the key elements in the growth and success of our museum has been the support of grants from IMLS. We have received technical assistance from the Museum and Conservation Assessment programs and funding that has helped build our education program from the Learning Opportunities grant program. The museum grant programs at IMLS are the primary federal means of assisting museums in improving their public services. The Administration's \$41,385,000 request for the Office of Museum Services Fiscal Year 2007 is a vital and necessary investment in our nation's more than 15,000 museums. I respectfully request that the subcommittee approve the President's request.

As we at AAM celebrate our centennial this year, my colleagues and I within the museum community are celebrating the contributions our institutions have made to American life over the past 100 years. As we look to our future, we embrace the opportunities and challenges that face us as we seek to serve new audiences and the next generation of museumgoers. For the past 30 years, Congress, through IMLS, has helped museums advance our missions of public service and collections care and preservation by providing a pool of competitive funding from which we can apply for grants. These highly competitive grants offer the leverage and recognition we need to attract additional support from individual donors, businesses, and foundations as well as state and local governments. Annually, IMLS must turn down many excellent projects because there is just not enough money to go around.

I recognize you face difficult choices in allocating resources to all the many worthy and necessary programs that are within this subcommittee's jurisdiction. My appeal today is to ask you to consider what we lose if we do not continue to invest in our nation's museums. We have a longstanding tradition of educating and inspiring our nation's children, of creating treasured family memories, and providing each community with a place to reconnect with its achievements and history. Without help, we risk losing the places in our society where we can dream about our past and our future and explore from the smallest bugs and plants to the vast expanses of our universe, and where we can inspire the young and old to lead creative and productive lives. Earlier this year, you and your colleagues in Congress recognized the valuable role museums play in communities by passing a House resolution supporting the goals and ideals of the Year of the Museum. We hope that recognition can not only be in words but in deeds by supporting additional funding for IMLS in their Fiscal 2007 budget.

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The Office of Museum Services at the Institute of Museum and Library Services**

Chairman Regula, Representative Obey and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, the American Association of Museums (AAM) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on the Fiscal Year 2007 budget for the museum program at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This agency is the primary federal entity devoted to assisting museums in fulfilling their role as centers for lifelong learning for all Americans. We respectfully request your approval of the Administration's budget request of \$41.385 million for the Office of Museum Services, which reflects a strong endorsement of the vital public service role museums play in their communities.

The American Association of Museums, headquartered in Washington D.C., is the national service organization that represents and addresses the needs of museums and to enhance their ability to serve the public. AAM disseminates information on current standards and best practices and provides professional development for museum professionals to ensure that museums have the capacity to contribute to life-long education in its broadest sense and to protect and preserve our shared cultural heritage. Since its founding in 1906, AAM has grown to more than 20,000 members across the United States – including over 13,800 individual members, more than 3,100 museums, and nearly 3,000 corporate members.

In celebrating our centennial year as a voluntary association serving the museum community, we have the opportunity to reflect on both the past and the future of our nation's museums. During this past century, museums have continued to evolve just as American society has changed. Yet the core public value of museums continues to be their role in education and stewardship of the objects and materials that are our cultural heritage – the pursuit and sharing of knowledge and understanding of the world around us and collecting and preserving the artifacts of our past and present for future generations.

My own museum, the Massillon Museum, is an accredited member of AAM. In 1933 our museum first opened its doors to the community as the realization of a dream of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Baldwin who bequeathed their house and grounds in the 1920s for use as a museum. Today our museum is located in downtown Massillon in the former Stark Dry Goods Store – which in the mid-1990's was transformed into a state-of-the-art facility. We are an integral part of our community's civic life and serve as a center of learning for the public.

One of the key elements in our growth and success has been the support of grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We have received technical assistance from the Museum Assessment Program and Conservation Assessment Program and from the Learning Opportunities grant program funding that has helped build our education program.

Leadership and funding from the federal government at this time of change for our nation's museums is critical. As we look to our future, we embrace the opportunities and challenges that face us as we seek to serve wider audiences and the next generation of learners. Funding from IMLS is a key ingredient in ensuring our nation's museums have the capacity to continue providing the public with learning experiences that help them understand the world around them and to continue caring for the public collections.

The largest IMLS grant program, Museums for America, strengthens museums as active resources for life-long learning and promoting greater quality of life in our communities. Our audiences demand more from us and this requires us to rethink how we are currently operating our museums. New technology offers us the opportunity to share information in different and more effective ways. We also need to continue to invest in the scholarship that is not always transparent to the public but intellectually underpins all of our exhibitions and activities and in the protection and conservation of our immense public collections.

Through the Museums for America program, IMLS helps support life-long learning, sustain our cultural heritage, and provide for centers of community engagement. This program offers flexibility to museums to move forward on their own institutional strategic goals. These grants improve the organizational capacity and advance the long-term sustainability of our nation's museums, rather than support for one-time projects or activities that have only a short-term impact.

In 2005, COSI Toledo (a 2005 recipient of the National Museum and Library Service Award) received a Museums for America grant to advance the museum's overall goal of creating an environment that promotes life long learning. The grant will help support the development of its Science Café. The Science Café will be a flexible public space conducive to inquiry-rich experiences and will increase the

museum's capacity for facilitating open-ended experiences. COSI Toledo would like to have a space for parents and students where they can feel comfortable, engage in the scientific process and learn more about scientific content – science, technology, engineering, and math – in a non-threatening environment.

As a matching grant program, Museums for America grants are an important leveraging tool that attracts additional private and public dollars. In the 2005 award cycle, the program received more than 500 applications requesting over \$50 million and IMLS awarded \$16.8 million to 169 museums that matched their grants with \$32.9 million in additional support.

In addition to assisting museums advance their institutional strategic goals, IMLS supports two technical assistance programs – Museum Assessment Program (MAP) and Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) – to help museums assess their operations and determine what areas of their operations they need to improve.

MAP provides our nation's museums the opportunity to assess and compare their operations to standards and best practices in our field and identify successful strategies used by other institutions and provides suggestions for improvements. Since 1997, the MAP has served more than 1,600 museums. Many of these institutions subsequently pursue accreditation by AAM, which is a national recognition of their commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards and continued institutional improvement.

The CAP program assists museums with a general survey of the condition of their collections, environmental conditions, and provides museum professionals with a list of conservation priorities. More than 1,200 museums have participated in the program since 1997. This program serves as a companion to the agency's Conservation Project Support, which helps fund activities that help the museum address the institution's greatest preservation needs. For example, last year the agency awarded 49 grants, including \$21,200 to the Akron Museum of Art to stabilize and conserve a group of 51 objects by German artist John Heartfield.

The Heritage Health Index (HHI), a recent report released by Heritage Preservation and funded with support from IMLS, presents a very sobering view of the conservation and preservation needs of our nation's collecting institutions. HHI is the first comprehensive survey ever conducted of the condition and preservation needs of our nation's collections. The report notes that more than 4.8 billion artifacts are held in the public trust by more than 30,000 archives, historical societies, libraries, museums, scientific research collections and archaeological repositories in the United States. These collections are at risk of damage because of deficient environmental conditions and storage.

While the most urgent preservation need is environmental controls, the report further details how we need to improve the care for our nation's collections. In addition to the hazards posed by environmental conditions such as high humidity, light, high temperatures, pollutants and dust, and pests, our institutions also face inadequate storage facilities that can cause damage to a collection with objects stored in basements and attics or crammed into areas too small to safely store them. We also need to work with the 78 percent of our nation's museums that have no emergency plan, with trained staff to carry it out.

An example of how IMLS addresses the conservation-training needs of our field was a 2003 grant to the Cleveland Zoo that helped them conduct a course in basic turtle husbandry and veterinary care. The Zoo matched the \$67,796 grant with an additional \$89,191.

One of our greatest challenges in caring for our collections is the lack of a stable source for preservation funding. Support for collections maintenance must be set aside when finances are scarce. Without a steady source of financial support, we rely on grants for the resources to care for our collections. We need the ongoing leadership of IMLS through its conservation programs to help us leverage additional public and private dollars for collections care and preservation.

IMLS is a critical partner in supporting the ongoing professional development needs of our field through its 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum Professionals program. Modeled after the program the agency developed to address the needs of the library community, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum Professionals program will help our field build its workforce capacity to meet the demands of the rising expectations of our communities, evolving technological applications, increasing diversity, emerging legal issues, and expanding responsibilities for leadership.

Throughout the country, museum directors face the added challenge of taking care of our buildings. While some of us struggle to repair and retrofit old and deteriorating buildings, others seek to keep up with the growing costs of operating large facilities. Here in the nation's capital, the Smithsonian Institution faces aging facilities and systems that officials estimate would require a \$2.3 billion investment over the next nine years to solve the most pressing problems. While this high profile situation caught the attention of the media, and, I am certain, members of Congress, many of us in smaller communities from small institutions face the same situation but are more limited in our ability to make our infrastructure needs more visible.

Congress, by providing a pool of competitive grant funding through IMLS, has helped museums advance their missions of public service and to be more responsible stewards of the public's heritage. These highly competitive grants offer

the leverage and recognition we need to attract additional support from individual donors, businesses, and foundations as well as state and local governments. Annually, IMLS must turn down many excellent projects because there is just not enough money to go around.

I recognize you face difficult choices in allocating resources to all the many worthy and necessary programs that are within this subcommittee's jurisdiction. My appeal today is to ask you to consider what we lose if we do not continue to invest in our nation's museums. We have a longstanding tradition of educating and inspiring our nation's children, of creating treasured family memories, and providing each community with a place to reconnect with its achievements and history. As we struggle to sustain financially our institutions and our missions, we need the federal government's participation with other funders to meet our needs and public responsibilities. Without that help, we risk losing the places in our society where we can dream about our past and our future and explore from the smallest bugs and plants to the vast expanses of our universe, and where we can inspire the young and old to lead creative and productive lives.

Earlier this year, you and your colleagues in Congress recognized the valuable role museums play in communities across this country by passing a House resolution supporting the goals and ideals of the Year of the Museum, which gives communities an opportunity to celebrate the contributions museums have made to American life over the past 100 years. We hope that recognition can not only be in words but also in deeds by supporting additional funding for IMLS in their Fiscal 2007 budget.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify before the committee today and I am happy to answer any questions.

### **Christine Fowler Shearer**

Christine Fowler Shearer is the director of the Massillon Museum. She received her BA in Art History from Kent State University in 1993 and her MA in Art History from the University of Notre Dame in 1996. Before coming to the Massillon Museum in 2001, Shearer served as the first full-time executive director of the Cleveland Artists Foundation for three years. While at the Cleveland Artists Foundation she increased the awareness of the organization through exhibitions and publications. In addition, she helped double membership support and increased the operating budget by fifty percent.

In the first two years as director of the Massillon Museum, she has helped double attendance and has diversified financial support. She is currently an officer and member of the board of trustees of the Ohio Museums Association, a leadership council member of the American Diabetes Association Cleveland/Lakefront District, and a vision council member of the United Way Stark County.

Shearer has curated a number of exhibitions, including *Breaking With Tradition: Ohio Women Painters, 1870-1950*, *Transcended Memories*, *Framework of a Community: The Steel Industry in Stark County*, *Untrodden Paths: Contemporary Landscape Painters*, *William Glackens: Works and Process*, *Carl Gaertner: A Story of Earth and Steel*, and *The Poetics of Place: Charles Burchfield and the Cleveland Connection*. She has been a contributor to a number of publications, including *Carl Gaertner: A Story of Earth and Steel*; *Paul Travis*; *Framework of a Community: The Steel Industry in Stark County*; and *Breaking with Tradition: Ohio Women Painters 1870-1950*.



**Massillon Museum - Federal Grants and Contracts**

<u>Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Fiscal Year</u>
Institute of Museum & Library Services Conservation Assessment Program Grant	\$7,730	FY 2004
Institute of Museum & Library Services Learning Opportunities Grant	\$36,698	FY 2004

**American Association of Museums - Federal Grants and Contracts**

<u>Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Fiscal Year</u>
Institute of Museum and Library Services Office of Museum Services Museum Assessment Program - Governance	\$9,599	FY 2004
Institute of Museum and Library Services Office of Museum Services Nazi Era Provenance Portal	\$68,592	FY 2004
United States Information Agency International Partnership Among Museums	\$196,023	FY 2004
Institute of Museum and Library Services Office of Museum Services Museum Assessment Program	\$24,212	FY 2005
Institute of Museum and Library Services Office of Museum Services Nazi Era Provenance Portal	\$61,908	FY 2005
United States Information Agency International Partnership Among Museums	\$10,312	FY 2005
United States Information Agency International Partnership Among Nations	\$101,084	FY 2005
Institute of Museum and Library Services Office of Museum Services Museum Assessment Program	\$101,004.75	FY 2006
Institute of Museum and Library Services Office of Museum Services Nazi Era Provenance Portal	\$10,771.97	FY 2006
United States Information Agency International Partnership Among Museums	\$45,761.11	FY 2006