



Testimony of the Coalition of Living Museums
For the Joint Legislative Environmental Conservation Budget Hearing
February 13, 2017

Good afternoon. My name is Aaron Bouska and I have the pleasure of being the Vice President for Government and Community Relations at The New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. Thank you to Chairman Farrell and Chairman Young for affording me the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Governor Andrew Cuomo's Executive Budget.

I would also like to acknowledge all the members of the Environment Conservation Committee, but especially Chairmen Steven Englebright and Chairman Thomas O'Mara for their leadership and support of living museums and their unique role in both New York State's economy and the protection of our environment. New York's environment has many champions, but few as committed and effective as these two individuals. Thank you.

On behalf of NYBG and all 112 Coalition of Living Museum member institutions statewide, I would like to express our enthusiastic support for Governor Cuomo's proposal to repeat the historic milestone achieved last year – a \$300M Environmental Protection fund, and within it, a \$15M Zoos, Botanical Gardens, and Aquaria (ZBGA) appropriation. So much good has been done this past year with this new level of funding, and we are all excited to do even more.

CLM's institutions span 44 counties and represent a diverse collection of zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, arboreta and nature centers. From the Aquarium of Niagara to the Old Westbury Gardens on Long Island and from the Rosamond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse to the Wild Center in the Adirondacks, living museums are major tourist destinations that educate and inspire the public. To maintain our appeal, living collections require constant intensive care of our wildlife and plants even in times of economic hardship, or as we like to say "You can't just put the begonias in the basement." Which is why, in their wisdom, the Legislature the State of New York established this unique fund almost 30 years ago.

While living museums work hard at their mission by helping to breed and protect endangered species, addressing the impacts of global climate change, what we are most proud of is educating and inspiring thousands of public school teachers and millions of school children, literally growing the next generation of conservation stewards. It is not a stretch to say that living museums are the state's heartbeat of ecological literacy, inspiring the public and constituents to care about New York State's natural resources.

Leveraging ZBGA funding which is awarded through a competitive grants process administered by the Department of Parks, living museums employ close to seven thousand New York State residents and generate hundreds of millions of dollars each year for the state in tourism dollars and economic development. Over 12 million visitors sought refuge in our environmental sanctuaries and these impressive numbers continue to grow both from domestic audiences and as more and more international tourists make New York a chosen destination. We know that tourism is one of the bright spots in the economy and CLM institutions are proud to help generate much needed revenue for New York State.

It is for these three reasons, quality environmental literacy programs, leveraging of public to create and maintain jobs, and measurable economic development through tourism and neighborhood impact, that the ZBGA fund is a government program that works for all New Yorkers, regardless of geographic location or socio-economic status. Thank you again, Assembly and Senate, for your long term commitment to this unique program and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted by: Aaron Bouska, Secretary, Coalition of Living Museum Steering Committee
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