

Submitted Testimony



Testimony of the Coalition of Living Museums  
For the Joint Legislative Environmental Conservation Budget Hearing  
January 28, 2015

Good Afternoon, my name is Aaron Bouska and I have the distinct pleasure of serving as the Vice President for Government and Community Relations at The New York Botanical Garden. First of all, thank you Chairman Herman D. Farrell, Jr. and Chairman John A. DeFrancisco for affording us the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Governor Andrew Cuomo's SFY15/16 Executive Budget, specifically funding for New York's environment.

**On behalf of all 112 Coalition of Living Museum member institutions statewide, I would like to especially acknowledge all the members of the Environment Conservation and Finance Committees for their leadership and support of living museums and their unique role in both New York State's economy and the protection of our fragile environment.** Without their leadership in particular—and indeed the support of so many Senators and Assembly members throughout the State—our institutions would be very different places today.

CLM's institutions span 44 counties and represent a diverse collection of zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, arboretums 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.

The EPF, the dedicated source of funding for programs like ZBGA funding and other critical programs that protect our clean water and natural resources in every county of New York State, was increased by \$10 million to \$172 million in the Executive Budget proposal. We applaud the Governor for this increase, and thank him for his investment – particularly the \$100,000 proposed increase to the ZBGA appropriation.

The Coalition of Living Museums urges the Senate and Assembly to build upon the Governor's increase to the EPF and respectfully asks the Legislature and Governor to further increase the Environmental Protection Fund during upcoming budget meetings and negotiations. **More specifically, we are requesting the Senate and Assembly help increase the ZBGA appropriation by an additional \$900,000 –bringing the total adopted appropriation to \$12,350,000 – during the current budget negotiations.**

To maintain our appeal, living collections require constant intensive care of our wildlife and plants even in times of economic hardship – as CLM's former Chairman Lois Carswell likes to say, "You can't just put the begonias in the basement." To receive funding from New York State, living museums must have public education and environmental literacy / interpretation as a core mission.

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. Perhaps Assemblyman Steven Englebright said it best in The New York Times, "It is through these institutions - the excitement of a trip to the zoo, or the ability to touch an exotic plant at the botanical gardens - that stirs the imagination and leads to a lifetime commitment to caring about the natural world." But this is only part of the story.

**Leveraging ZBGA funding which is awarded through a competitive grants process administered by the Department of Parks, living museums employ at least 4210 full-time and 2728 part-time New York State residents and generate hundreds of millions of dollars each year for the state in tourism dollars and economic development.** Living museums, big and small, upstate and downstate, from Nassau to Erie Counties are core to stabilizing local

economies by providing thousands of good paying jobs while supporting local vendors and small businesses. Even during this current fiscal downturn, over 12 million visitors sought refuge in our environmental sanctuaries and these impressive numbers continue to grow as people stay closer to home and 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 during difficult times.

Here are a few specific examples that are repeated throughout the State of New York:

### **Staten Island Zoo**

*For the last 75 years, the Staten Island Zoo has been a proud provider of cultural activity, conservation advocacy, and wildlife education. As the first Zoo to include an educational mandate in its mission statement, the Staten Island Zoo has remained dedicated to educational opportunities for local youth. Each year, the Staten Island Zoo serves over 170,000 visitors. Furthermore, the Zoo provides educational opportunities for nearly 25,000 school children annually. The Zoo contributes more than \$3 million into the economy, creating jobs for New Yorkers, supporting local businesses and generating tax revenue for our city.*

### **Mohonk Preserve**

*A recent survey of Mohonk Preserve, New York State's largest non-profit nature preserve and ZBGA recipient, indicated that its 150,000 annual visitors generate a conservative \$3 million in direct food, lodging, and other retail expenditures (bike rentals, rock climbing equipment, gas, etc.) per year, while generating 13,500 lodging nights per year. The Mohonk Preserve generates over \$200,000 in sales tax revenues for Ulster County. Furthermore, this activity sustains 75 tourism-related jobs. Using a multiplier of x2 for how the dollar cycles through the regional economy, the total economic impact of this publicly accessible, non-governmental natural area is well over \$6 million per year to the Hudson Valley.*

### **Wildlife Conservation Society**

*WCS has a major economic impact upon New York City – generating significant amounts of employment, purchasing goods and services, and drawing visitors and visitor spending to the city. These in turn generate additional impact via induced and indirect effects as WCS employees, local vendors, and their employees' purchase of additional goods and services. This impact benefits not just the private sector, but also generates tax revenues.*

*Overall, the total economic activity generated by WCS during fiscal year 2010 was \$315.6 million, with an associated \$113.3 million in total earnings and 2,662 total full time jobs. The total tax impact to New York City including indirect and induced effects was \$9.7 million. The total economic activity generated by the New York Aquarium during fiscal 2010 was \$43.4 million, with an associated \$10.8 million in total earnings.*

It is for these three reasons, **quality environmental literacy programs, leveraging of modest public and private resources 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.

To conclude, all of our living museums recognize that New York State continues to face challenging economic realities, and we applaud Governor Cuomo for putting the State on a trajectory that has resulted in a budget surplus. We are optimistic that Governor Cuomo will work with the Legislature to further improve New York's environment through additional investments in the EPF. I respectfully request that programs like ZBGA continue to remain at the forefront of your budgetary decision-making as you work towards another on-time budget.

Respectfully submitted by:

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