

Testimony of Bernard Fishman, Director of the Maine State Museum

LD 258 "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"

Presented to the Joint Standing Committees on
Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Education and Cultural Affairs
February 13, 2023 10:00 a.m.

Senator Rotundo and Representative Sachs of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee, and honorable members of the legislature present for this joint committee meeting, I am Bernard Fishman, Director of the Maine State Museum, and I am here to summarize the museum's proposed budget for the coming biennium.

Background

As I reviewed earlier with the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, the museum presently finds itself in a difficult position because of the ongoing renovation project in the Cultural Building in Augusta, where, beginning in 1971, the museum's extensive public exhibits and its offices were located. The museum was closed to the on-site public in 2020, first for COVID and then because of the mechanical failures in the Cultural Building that led to the massive and ongoing renovation project. For two and a half years, much of the museum staff has been engaged in serving the needs of the renovation project, removing thousands of exhibit objects to protected storage and clearing or reducing tens of thousands of square feet of exhibits. This work continues. The construction is scheduled for completion in mid-2024, but the museum will need at least a year to move back and install its new opening exhibits, and so expects to re-open to the public in 2025.

The museum was founded in 1836 and is the oldest of the nation's 44 state museums, though probably the smallest. It became a Maine state agency in 1965. By statute it was created to collect and preserve the physical materials representing the full significance of Maine's great cultural, environmental, and economic heritage. The museum manages the state's flag and portrait collections, and the displays in the State House and the Blaine House. The museum also arranges the public tours for those locations. Statute defines the museum's mission as an educational one, expressed especially through exhibits, but also in outreach and research

projects. The result is that the museum has assembled Maine's largest and most comprehensive historical and environmental collections, some 800,000 objects. Caring for these is a major and a continuing part of the museum's work. An on-site audience of nearly 50,000 per year came to the museum when it was open, including over 15,000 students, the largest student audience of any Maine museum. When the museum re-opens, we are confident these numbers will increase.

At present we continue to exercise our preservation and educational missions, though most of our educational work has moved on-line during the closure. Some 4,000 people were reached directly last year through museum classes and presentations, and over 200,000 virtual visitors connected with us through our website offerings and social media. We are also deeply involved in planning major new exhibits for our re-opening.

We anticipate with great excitement the upgraded and beautified Cultural Building that will reward our endurance with a safer, more efficient, and educationally more effective structure than the one we left over two years ago, in what now seems like another age. But the Cultural Building project, which as you know is also of supreme importance to the State Library and the State Archives, has turned into a truly massive enterprise, and one vital to our state; I urge our legislators to support the significant costs necessary to properly complete the project, specifically the \$ 5 million being currently requested by the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS) in the supplemental budget.

First Museum Budget Program: Maine State Museum 0180.

On page A-545 of your museum budget, **Maine State Museum 0180**, is the baseline General Fund Budget for the museum's operations. This budget is essentially the same as the one in the last biennium, plus modest routine cost increases required by various state government departments providing services to the museum. It includes Personal Services for the salaries and benefits of the museum's staff of 21 full-time equivalent positions. Under All Other are the museum's non-personnel General Fund costs, which cover a portion of the tools, equipment, and services enabling the staff members to perform their specialized functions. Here I'll mention that the museum normally raises a distinct portion of its total expenses from non-state government sources, an amount typically in the 15-20% range of its whole budget. I'll note also that being closed to on-site visitors means a continuing annual loss to the museum of over \$ 100,000 in admissions and store sales.

Four General Fund Initiatives

We are proposing four initiatives in the General Fund, two of which were mandated to the museum by other state providers, and two of which are directly related to the Cultural Building renovation project. These are also on page A-545 of your budget.

Initiative 1: Technology upgrades.

These are one-time costs, estimated by the Office of Information Technology, to provide necessary technology upgrades in the exhibit galleries for the museum's re-opening, as well as for some routine cost increases in existing network services. Improved gallery wiring and equipment will allow for more versatile exhibits, greater interactivity with visitors, and wi-fi capacity that can be extended to most museum areas. Providing visitors with the means to gain additional information through phones and other devices is a growing and essential element in modern museum practice and is especially valuable and necessary for school and student education.

Initiative 2: New Shelving.

This amount is one-time funding that will allow the museum to acquire additional fixed and wheeled shelving to provide storage for its growing collections of photographs, documents, and maps.

Initiative 3: Mandated Insurance Coverage.

This figure is obligated to us by Risk Management to cover industry-wide cost increases.

Initiative 4: Mandated Costs for the Financial and Human Resources Service Center.

This figure is a DAFS-approved cost increase for supporting the Service Center.

Within this category of **Maine State Museum 0180**, and located on page A-546, is Other Special Revenue Funds. This account, unchanged from the previous biennium, estimates revenues from certain peripheral sources, and therefore extends permission to spend those amounts. Located here are funds from the Museum Sales Program and the Maine State Museum Endowment for Publishing. Sales, as I've mentioned, are presently minuscule, and the Publishing Endowment derives from past museum sales. Neither fund comes from state revenues. These amounts are projections to cover possibilities that might reasonably materialize at some point in the biennium.

Second Museum Budget Program: Operating Fund Z179.

The museum's budget categorizations have been handed down from remote antiquity and are not always easy to recognize as a single connected whole, though they are. Here is another operating account, to be found on page A-546, with its own section for Other Special Revenue Funds. These amounts are essentially unchanged from the previous biennium, except for a small, required, addition to cover the increased costs of personal services. In this category are potentially anticipated funds from museum admissions. As of now the museum has no

admissions revenue, but these figures allow for the possibility of such income within the coming biennium.

Third Museum Budget Program: Research & Collection-Museum 0174

Within the category of Research & Collection, Museum 0174, are the Federal Expenditures Fund and Other Special Revenue Funds, which you will see on page A-547.

The Federal Expenditures Funds amount is unchanged from the previous biennium. It reflects an estimate of what federal grants might bring to the museum during the biennium.

We currently have two federal grant applications pending, and we will learn by summer if they are successful.

The Other Special Revenue Funds account holds the funds we hope to raise through grants from individuals, businesses, foundations, and other competitively awarded grants for special projects.

Initiative 5. Increase in the Amount for the Other Special Revenue Funds Account.

Here we wish to increase the amount permitted in this category because we expect to increase funding appeals in anticipation of the museum's re-opening. This request is an allocation, and any incoming funds in these two categories would not be from the state's General Fund.

I thank you for your attention to the museum's budget requests. Only the first two initiatives, for upgrading information technology for educational purposes and for some additional collections storage shelving, represent more than tiny additions to the museum's budget from the General Fund. Those amounts are not vast and reflect needs directly resulting from the museum's mission and its future requirements.

Not just an elephant, but a Blue Whale in the museum's living room is the looming presence of the Cultural Building renovation. Can it be completed according to the new schedule and the new budget? And how will all the competing needs be weighed and met? All involved are trying their best to tame this beast in the face of substantial challenges, and we at the museum are vigilantly responding to the roller-coaster momentum of this complex project. But you'll see from these requests that the museum is actively planning its return to a full, public, on-site presence after years of a more pixelated existence. In these requests you see our eagerness to return to a position of outstanding public service, in the premier location in sight of the State House, where we and our sister agencies belong and long to return.