



Strengthening Museums Across Alaska
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July 30, 2019

University of Alaska Board of Regents
c/o Chair John Davies
P.O. Box 81781
Fairbanks, AK 99708

Dear Mr. Davies,

Museums Alaska, the statewide association of museum professionals, has identified supporting the University of Alaska Museum of the North as one of our top legislative priorities. We write this letter to protest the Alaska State Office of Management and Budget's proposal to cut all investments to research and eliminate funding for the Museum of the North this fiscal year. Costs cannot be recovered through increasing fees alone, as the OMB has proposed. Matching federal funds are at risk. What may appear to be a sound cost cutting measure goes against the State's fiduciary duty to safeguard collections in perpetuity and make them available for research. Our state's natural and cultural heritage is not a negotiating point.

In 2014, the Museum of the North was officially recognized by the State of Alaska as a Natural and Cultural History Repository, pursuant with 4 AAC 58.300. The designation certifies that the museum maintains the highest standard of professional practice and is an appropriate place for the long-term care of Alaska's patrimony. The museum is the largest of three institutions in Alaska to house state-owned collections from state land. Additionally, the Museum of the North is one of only seven museums in the state of Alaska to achieve accreditation through the American Alliance of Museums for its commitment to, and demonstration of, the professional standards for education, public service, and collections care.

Funding cuts threaten Alaskan, US, and international students and researchers access to primary resource materials to feed their questions. In FY18, the museum hosted 1150 MA or MS students and 250 research colleagues from around the world in collections. An additional 2,539 public questions were fielded to help identify bones found in people's yards, old baskets inherited from their families, insects discovered in their gardens, and paintings uncovered in their attics. And most dramatic of all, 1,406,806,896 museum records were downloaded from their online collection management system, Arctos. Funding cuts would jeopardize the ability to maintain and edit this tremendous resource.



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The economic argument for rejecting the OMB's proposed cuts is powerful, too. For every dollar the University of Alaska Fairbanks puts into research, there is a 3 to 6 dollar return (depending on unit), mostly from federal grants. If the state withdraws its support, these partnership opportunities will likely go to faculty and students in other states. The money the state spends on university research is well spent for the excellent training it gives students, the knowledge it develops, and the superb direct investment in the state's economy.

When budgets are tight, museums are needed more than ever. They preserve our heritage, tell our stories, and explore the future. Museums are a leading source for trusted and unbiased information. Museums are also essential to the state economy—generating grant funds, stimulating jobs, and contributing taxes.

We hope this letter has helped convince you to support funding for the Museum of the North. Please feel free to contact us if you are interested in discussing this further, at 907-474-5484 or director@museumsalaska.org.

Sincerely,

Museums Alaska Board of Directors