



# Coalition of Living Museums

Preserving the Past, Improving the Present  
and Educating for the Future

**2025 Joint Legislative Budget Hearings:  
Environmental Conservation  
January 28, 2025**

Distinguished Senators Harckham, Krueger and Serrano; Esteemed Assembly Members Pretlow, Glick and Kim:

From the *Buffalo Zoo* to the *New York Aquarium* and everywhere in between, the Zoos, Botanical Gardens, and Aquaria (ZBGA) line of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) directly supports *essential* staff caring for living collections of 97 zoos, botanical gardens, nature centers and aquaria in every corner of NY State. This four-decade success story would not be possible without the leadership and historic, constant support of the NY State Assembly and Senate. Thank you!

Governor Hochul's SFY 25/26 Executive Budget maintains a \$400 million funding level without offloads for agency expenses; this action is appreciated, and given the current forecast of spending an additional \$10 billion for next year, simply is not enough for the EPF and program like ZBGA.

Like every non-profit, living museums are facing increased operating expenses at an alarming rate. Although every measure is taken to reduce costs and operate efficiently, animals must be fed, botanical collections must be nurtured and the salaries of the staff who accomplish these vital tasks must be funded. Living museums prove themselves a sound investment for NY State funding through the four decades of ZBGA funding. We are economic generators providing good paying jobs, serving as living classrooms that educate over a million school children annually, and are safe green spaces accessible to all New Yorkers no matter their socioeconomic circumstances.

**Living Museums are extremely grateful to the NY Assembly and NY Senate for restoring cuts proposed over the last few years and respectfully ask you increase EPF funding to \$500M in the adopted budget with a ZBGA appropriation of at least \$25M.** There are three primary reasons why growing the ZBGA and EPF should be prioritized by the Senate and Assembly this year:

**1.) Growing ZBGA maintains employment and fuels economic development:**

Living museums provide more than quality environmental education and uniquely beautiful tourist destinations; they are strong economic engines during difficult times. Leveraging ZBGA funding awarded through a competitive grants process, living museums employ at least 14,000 New York State residents and generate hundreds of millions of dollars each year for the state in tourism dollars and economic development.

Institutions like the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, the Utica Zoo, and the Wild Center in Tupper Lake are core to stabilizing local economies by providing good-paying jobs and supporting local businesses. Wildlife Conservation Society and the New York Botanical Garden both have a major economic impact on the Bronx and New York City – generating significant amounts of employment, purchasing goods and services, and drawing visitors and visitor spending to the city. This impact benefits not just the private sector, but also generates substantial tax revenues through sales and income tax receipts from employees.



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**2.) Growing ZBGA helps outdoor museums remain accessible to the public at a time when families need safe, and economical outdoor experiences most:**

**Access to economical, safe green space, particularly in urban areas, is an issue of equity and fairness.** Our visitors are likely our neighbors, many of whom are not able to travel to one of our magnificent State Parks. As the cost of living increases so does the cost of many family recreational activities. Over 2 million of our visitors enjoy free or reduced-cost access. Our organizations provide an economical option where families not only can enjoy recreation but can strengthen their connection to our living planet and the responsibility we all shoulder to care for it. In staying close to home, many also experience large crowds and the lack of safety enforcement in our municipal park system. In short, botanical gardens and zoos help to meet the demand for *safe and economical outdoor space* at a time when New Yorkers' mental and physical health need the extra boost resulting from time outdoors.

**3.) Growing ZBGA protects quality environmental literacy programs statewide:**

While living museums advance their missions by helping to breed and protect endangered species, addressing the impacts of global climate change, and fighting the spread of invasive species, we are most proud of educating and inspiring over 1 million school children and thousands of public school teachers, 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. Critical to the goals of the EPF, living museums educate the next generation of conservation stewards and create an informed electorate that values and understands the severe threat to our planet posed by climate change. More, now than ever, living museums are critical in providing rich, conservation-based educational experiences for classrooms and teachers.

**For all these reasons, and so many more, we implore the Legislature to increase EPF funding to \$500 million and expand ZBGA to at least \$25M in the adopted SFY 25/26 budget.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron T. Bouska  
Chair, Coalition of Living Museums



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## Statewide Impact:

- **160,000+ Acres of green space** managed, and curated by the CLM
- **200,000+ Hours of access** provided to *all* New Yorkers exposing them to the natural world through a wide array of programming
- **\$600M** in combined operating budgets serving as an **economic generator** throughout the State
- **14,000 People Employed** throughout the CLM organizations
- **768 Youth Under the age of 18** gain vital work experience with the CLM
- **10M Visitors** benefit from our programming and access (over **2M** visited for free **or at a reduced rate**)
- **410,000 Members** demonstrate their support of the CLM organizations as members
- **16,000 Volunteers** dedicate their time and energy in support of our programming and missions
- **1M+ School Children** benefit from the educational experiences we provide