

Coalition of Living Museums

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New York State Division of the Budget Brooklyn Public Hearings in Preparation for the 2008-09 Budget November 27th, 2007

Good afternoon. I am Lois Carswell and I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am speaking to you today wearing two hats – as Chairman of the statewide Coalition of Living Museums (CLM) and as Chairman Emeritus of Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Brooklyn Botanic Garden is one of the more than 100 zoos, botanical gardens, nature centers and aquaria located in 41 counties throughout New York State who receive funding from the Environmental Protection Fund.

From the Aquarium of Niagara Falls to the Theodore Roosevelt Bird Sanctuary in Oyster Bay, from the Staten Island Zoo to the Buffalo Museum of Science, funding from the EPF directly cares for fragile living collections – 10,000 animals and hundreds of thousands of plants and plant specimens, forming the richest zoological and botanical resource of any state in the country. With 12 million visitors annually, New York's living museums are family destinations providing important positive economic impacts through promoting eco-tourism to cities and towns across New York.

Living museums are living classrooms which instill a sense of wonder in every visitor. The Coalition's wide ranging education and research programs complement the State's efforts in education, health, and the environment and contribute services which the state might otherwise have to provide on its own. CLM institutes operate with a combination

of public and private funds which support the constant and continuous care their collections require.

With current ZBGA program funding of \$8 million, New York's living museums serve over 12 million visitors a year at a cost to New York State of less than \$1 per visitor. Even to a Brooklynite, that sounds like a bargain.

Children come to our institutions in class groups to learn about nature and as a supplement to school science programs. Teachers attend workshops and in-service programs for science enrichment and greater understanding of environmental issues. Being close to nature teaches respect for it. Youngsters are involved in breeding programs, animal rescue and rehabilitation programs, organic gardening, bird watching, the conservation of native plants, solar energy, air and water quality, recycling and waste disposal programs.

At the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Project Green Reach takes its fragile living collection out into Brooklyn's Title 1 schools and has enriched the lives of over 45,000 Brooklyn schoolchildren and provided professional support to nearly 1,500 teachers. This program at BBG would not be possible without the financial support of the ZBGA program of the EPF.

All of the programs at CLM institutes come at a cost, and inflation and increasing demand for such services combine to make EPF funding ever more important to all living museums across the state. As you consider New York State's budget this year, the Coalition of Living Museums urges you to increase ZBGA funding to \$10 million this year and to expand the EPF to \$300 million. We also urge consideration of a "bigger, better, bottle bill" to encourage conservation and to expand possible funding for the EPF.

I hope you agree that living museums play an important role in the education of our youth and the future of New York's environment. All of us in the Coalition of Living Museums look forward to working with you to grow these vital environmental programs.