

**Testimony for New York State Division of the Budget Town Hall Hearing
on behalf of the Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums Program (ZBGA)**

My name is Donna Fernandes and I am President/CEO of the Buffalo Zoo. Today, I am here as a member of the Coalition of Living Museums (CLM), a nonprofit organization representing the interests of New York's living collection institutions. CLM has 98 member institutions spanning 44 counties in New York State.

I am here to request increased support for ZBGA. Established in 1978, New York State's Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums Program (ZBGA) provides critical funding for the unique needs of cultural institutions with living collections such as zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, arboreta and nature centers.

Like other cultural centers, our "living museums" aim to educate and inspire the public. However, we require constant intensive care of our wildlife and plants.

In FY 05, the ZBGA program was moved into the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and increased to \$6 million (the first increase in 20 years). In FY'07, ZBGA was increased to \$8 million.

70 institutions were funded last year, up from 54 twenty years ago. New eligible institutions are added each year, further diluting the grant pool. In fact, because of new institutions coming on board, the Buffalo Zoo has received funding cuts from ZBGA despite increased funding to the program.

Living museums generate millions of dollars each year for the state in tourism and economic development.

Some of the most visited tourist attractions in New York State are living museums. The Buffalo Zoo is the most popular cultural destination in Erie County, attracting over 400,000 visitors each year, including 50,000 school children.

New York's living museums are also the conservators, protectors and interpreters of our natural world.

Collectively, our institutions provide the richest zoological and botanical resources of any state in the union.

Our living collections help to breed endangered species, educate and inspire thousands of teachers and millions of children in natural science, and grow a new generation of conservation stewards.

ZBGA was originally intended to provide 10 percent of the combined operating costs of New York's living museums, but has failed to keep up with the rising costs of these facilities. Today, ZBGA covers less than three percent of our collections care costs.

Over the last few years, municipal and county support for our living museums has declined. In addition, it is increasingly difficult for us to raise private funds from foundations for basic operations and maintenance since foundations prefer to support specific programs rather than general operating costs. The ZBGA program serves a critical role in providing the basic care necessary to keep our animals and plants healthy and thriving. Unlike art galleries, living museums cannot close a wing when funds are low.

To help New York's living museums survive in these difficult times, we ask that this year's budget include a \$300 million itemized EPF and urge you to increase ZBGA to \$10 million.

Increased ZBGA support of \$10 million this year is more critical than ever in enabling us to serve more than 12 million visitors...the biggest bargain in New York State.