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LA Leaders Call for \$125 Million to Preserve Cultural and Historical Sites in the Face of Climate Change

Los Angeles – Representatives of the region’s renowned museums joined elected officials at the iconic La Brea Tar Pits today to call attention to the dire need for safeguarding vital cultural assets in the face of increasingly frequent climate-fueled disasters.

Many of California’s archives, galleries, historical societies, libraries, museums, and tribal nations lack disaster response plans and long-term protection strategies for their collections. Museum research labs, exhibitions, and programs play a crucial role in educating the public about the environment, including steps that can be taken to reduce negative influences on the planet’s inhabitants and climate system.

Fire incidents around Griffith Park have caused concern for animal welfare at the Los Angeles Zoo, and sea-level rise is threatening the San Francisco Museum of Craft and Design. The Santa Barbara Historical Museum’s subterranean collections vault has been impacted by increased heat, and the San Bernardino County Museum has faced increased costs in maintaining appropriate temperatures and humidity levels due to increasingly hot summers.

When the town of Paradise was destroyed by fire in 2018, the Gold Nugget Museum was lost. The Charles M. Schulz Museums’ collections and facilities were just a half mile away from the devastating 2017 Tubbs Fire in Santa Rosa. The museums have been in a wildfire evacuation zone twice in the last five years. Just last week, the Cy Hall Memorial Museum was lost in the Gold Rush town of Greenville. Insurance carriers are notifying many museums that they will no longer insure their buildings or collections against wildfire risk.

State Senator Ben Allen (D – Santa Monica), Assemblymember Richard Bloom (D – Santa Monica), Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva (D – Fullerton), and Los Angeles City Councilmember Nithya Raman spoke in support of state funding for museums to adapt to

climate-related threats – specifically \$125 million for the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (CCHE).

“We risk losing artistic treasures and historical artifacts as the threat of rising seas, climbing temperatures, and drought-fueled wildfires ravage the state,” said California State Senator Ben Allen, Chair of the Joint Committee on the Arts and the Senate Environmental Quality Committee. “We should direct some of the state’s \$3.7 billion investments in climate resiliency to protecting California’s cultural and historic resources while helping them increase their efforts educating the public about climate change.”

“The climate crisis is a teaching opportunity for museums that deserves our attention. Museums also will play a central role when it comes to preserving and protecting the deterioration of California’s cultural and historic resources,” said Assemblymember Bloom. “I’m glad to see museums, so many of which are in my District, seeking badly needed funding for these mitigations and other climate-related projects. It is fitting that we hold today’s event at the Natural History Museum’s La Brea tar pits. As we experience contemporary climate change, the history, science, and lessons of Ice Age extinction and adaptation are well worth knowing.”

“As a teacher for over 30 years, I have seen the significant impact field trips to California’s Museums and Natural History sites have on students,” said Assemblywoman Quirk-Silva, Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee on the Arts. “These museums offer all Californians an opportunity to learn and grow an appreciation for arts, nature, and the wonderful lessons these landmarks provide.”

Dr. Lori Bettison-Varga (President of the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum Foundation and Director of the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County), Amy Scott (Executive Vice President of Research and Interpretation, Autry Museum of the American West), and Stacey Otte-Demangate (Executive Director of the Wildling Museum of Art & Nature and representative of Impact: Climate Change and the Urgency of Now in Santa Barbara – an 11-museum collaborative) illustrated the alarming challenges museums are facing.

“The iconic and historic La Brea Tar Pits are located in the middle of Los Angeles, one of the largest metropolises in the world. We have an extraordinary opportunity to educate vast numbers of visitors that an urgent and immediate response to address climate change is necessary for the survival of our planet’s biodiversity—including ourselves,” said Dr. Bettison-Varga. “This funding is important to support museums, like ours, in their efforts to educate our communities through exhibitions, public programs, and research about the impacts of climate change, as well as to become community-centric locations. With this support, we move from being civic icons to places with true, lasting civic impact.”

“We join the California Association of Museums in calling on the state for the resources necessary to make this work meaningful within an era of existential—some would say apocalyptic—threat posed by climate change,” said Amy Scott, Executive Vice President of Research and Interpretation, Autry Museum of the American West. “Together with our Indigenous communities, collections, staff and artists, the Autry is doing this work via multiple projects, including our forthcoming exhibition and publication *Indigenous Futures or How to Survive and Thrive After the Apocalypse*.”

“As educational institutions, museums have a pivotal role to play in helping Californians understand the inevitable impact of the climate crisis on the way we live,” said Jennifer Caballero, President of the California Association of Museums. “An investment from the State of

California in climate change education and mitigation in museums will boost our field's ability to promote long-term solutions and resiliency."

The California Legislature will reconvene August 16 and can begin determining budget allocations for climate, fire, and drought funding with a renewed sense of urgency following a [report issued Monday by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) warning that even if nations began aggressively cutting emissions, total global warming is likely to rise around 1.5 degrees Celsius within the next two decades, essentially guaranteeing a blistering future.

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Ben Allen represents the 26th State Senate District, which consists of the Hollywood, Westside, and South Bay communities of Los Angeles County. He chairs the Senate Environmental Quality Committee and the Joint Committee on the Arts.