

February 18, 2011

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Honorable Daniel Lipinski
United States House of Representatives
1717 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Lipinski:

On behalf of the hundreds of science centers and museums in this country – including the Museum of Science and Industry, the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum, and eleven others in Illinois – the Association of Science-Technology Centers opposes two amendments proposed for inclusion in H.R. 1, the *Full Year Continuing Appropriations Act of 2011*. The first, Amendment No. 35, would eliminate funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Nation's primary source of federal support for museums. The second, Amendment No. 471, would prohibit funding from the bill to be used for activities at non-federal museums. These amendments would decimate the ability of science centers and museums to compete for federal support, eliminating much of the learning and inspiration in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) that these institutions provide so effectively to our young people today.

These learning settings, outside the formal education system, offer people of all ages valuable and unique opportunities to become interested in STEM and more knowledgeable about the world around them. Such learning experiences foster a better informed citizenry and inspire young people to consider STEM careers in which they may help address societal challenges.

Improving science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education is critical to the Nation's economic strength and global competitiveness in the 21st century. To improve STEM education, it is important to draw on the full range of learning opportunities and experiences, including those in non-school settings. Science centers and museums in the United States receive more than 50 million visitors per year. Reports by the National Science Board, the Academic Competitiveness Council, and the National Academy of Sciences cite these types of institutions and their programs as an integral component of our Nation's education system. These respected studies make clear that science centers and museums can have a significant impact on STEM learning outcomes in historically underrepresented groups, and that these non-traditional, non-school settings are uniquely positioned to make STEM education accessible to all.

These findings are particularly significant since science centers



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and museums are on the front line when it comes to providing students, teachers, parents, and all citizens with the tools to appreciate the implications of important public policy issues that will affect our well being and standard of living now and well into the future. Science centers and museums are deeply engaged with local school systems to provide wide ranging programs of teacher training to help educators bring flexibility and creativity to the school curriculum. These centers and museums are also the venues for community dialogues and programs of learning on issues such as climate change, information technology, nanotechnology, alternative and conventional energy, and environmental impacts on health and well being.

As citizens and educators, ASTC members understand the budget challenges you face, along with your need to restrain spending. We do, however, believe it is wrong to completely deny our institutions the right to compete for merit-based support from authorized – and effective – federal programs. Such provisions work to deprive our children and their parents from the kind of educational experiences that will help today's students become productive citizens tomorrow. On behalf of America's science centers and museums, I therefore urge you and your colleagues to oppose these amendments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony Rock", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anthony (Bud) Rock
Chief Executive Officer