

# REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM

## 2017 Budget Hearing Testimony



**REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM**

of Maryland African American History & Culture

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Maryland African American Museum Corporation  
Budget Testimony

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The Maryland African American Museum Corporation, known as the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, is one of the largest museums on the east coast dedicated to the preservation of the African American cultural experience. We have a core collection of 10,000 plus objects, artifacts, documents, and photographs that span 400 years of Maryland history housed in an 82,000 square foot building which opened in 2005.

As many of you may know, the Museum has not been without its share of challenges since exiting the 2008 fiscal crises that paralyzed many companies and organizations throughout the country. We changed leadership three times, witnessed periods of debilitating depletions of staff at the senior most levels, and observed a sharp decline in operating capital and attendance.

Despite these lean, darker chapters, two things remained constant--the Board of Directors unwavering commitment to the Museum's success, and you, the elected representatives of this great state, have remained stalwart. Your continued recognition of us as Maryland's premier museum dedicated to the history and culture of African Americans resonates as an edifice of pride and community achievement within the state.

It is from this level of support and resolve that the Museum has made prudent, strategic moves to reorganize and position itself on firm ground. Looking toward the future, the Museum began 18 months ago rebuilding its senior staff hiring a veteran museum practitioner with 28 years of experience as director of collections and exhibitions to strengthen the academic scholarship. Next, a year-long national search was completed to secure an executive director; to which, one with over 30 years of a proven track record of leadership and organizational management, philanthropic acumen, and community engagement was appointed.

Over the last two months, the Museum retained the services of a noted development director with over 19 years of a successful reputation in the nonprofit cultural sector, and brought on a highly skilled accounting professional with more than 30 years of knowledge in the public, corporate and not-for-profit environments as the new director of finance and administration. Rounding out the senior management team, the Museum recently appointed a seasoned museum educator who spent the last 30 years working for two internationally recognized museums implementing sound educational and public programs to millions of museum visitors.

This new senior management team with combined professional experience of nearly 140 years is the Museum's first, but not the only step toward reorganization. In fact, moving into FY2018, the budget for salaries and benefits has been trimmed by

\$374,000 to provide additional capacity to better align the remaining staff with a new resolution to connect all people to Maryland's past, present, and future through the unparalleled journey of the African American experience.

Our continuing efforts at reorganization include a five-point plan designed to address some challenges faced by 21st century cultural institutions. The plan involves:

Fiscal Management & Compliance - by displaying and maintaining sound fiscal responsibility, and achieving regulatory compliance practices;

Advancement - by promoting financial development and backing among corporations, foundations and individuals supportive of the mission;

Education & Scholarship - by creating a compelling history and interpretive experience for visitors through scholarly exhibitions that appeal to the non-specialist, and broad appealing public programs that expand the notion of Maryland's African American history, art and culture for diverse audiences;

Community Engagement - by strengthening community partnerships with local constituents and national stakeholders;

Branding & Positioning - by developing new marketing strategies that support the vision statement and promote cultural branding through the development of unique exhibitions and creative programs.

As the Museum continues to manage its reorganization efforts, a significant partnership with the Smithsonian Institute's new National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington D.C. has been forged. The Lewis Museum is a long-standing member of the Smithsonian Affiliate program, and one of the closest museums that will benefit in time, from the NMAAHC's mandate to tell a national narrative and partner with local museum's to interpret regional storylines further. Therefore, we are thankful for the National Museum's ability to raise awareness of the country's history, especially since Maryland's history parallels the founding of America.

John Cotton Dana, considered the father of modern museums, made it his main objective to make museums relevant to the daily lives of people. He believed that "those who teach must never cease to learn." As the Reginald F. Lewis Museum continues to learn and evolve, Dana's philosophy echoes with great enthusiasm. We thank our representatives for their past support, and look forward to continued support of State allocations in FY 2018 and beyond.



# Thank You

