



February 16, 2021

**Alliance
Accreditation
Commission**

**Chair
Evans Richardson**
Chief of Staff,
The Studio Museum in
Harlem,
New York, NY

Rebekah Beaulieu
Director,
Florence Griswold
Museum,
Old Lyme, CT

Jill Hartz
Curator and Museum
Consultant,
Ashland, OR

Marise McDermott
President & CEO,
Witte Museum,
San Antonio, TX

C.J. Roberts
President & CEO,
Tampa Bay History
Center,
Tampa, FL

Melissa Russo
Director,
San Bernardino County
Museum,
Redlands, CA

Dr. Ellen Censky
President & CEO
Milwaukee Public Museum
800 W Wells St
Milwaukee, WI 53233-1478

Dear Dr. Censky,

The Accreditation Commission discussed the Milwaukee Public Museum at great length at our February 11-12, 2021 meeting, reviewing the Self-Study, supporting documents, and the Site Visit Report. After much consideration, we voted to table our decision on reaccreditation for approximately one year so that the museum and County can work together to demonstrate they are able to properly care for the collections in the near-term while plans evolve and funding is secured for the much-needed new building.

There is much to commend about the Milwaukee Public Museum and its accomplishments since the last accreditation review, particularly in the areas of financial management and board engagement and oversight. Likewise, the staff at all levels, under focused and experienced leadership, demonstrate exceptional public service. They do this, however, despite facing severe challenges with an inadequate facility that imperils the collections and diverts resources from other areas of need.

The materials the Commission reviewed are clear and convincing that the building, suffering from years of structural neglect and deferred maintenance, is utterly inadequate to meet even the most minimal standards of care for the collections. Notably, this issue was also a substantive concern cited during the last reaccreditation review. We note that the 2013 Lease Agreement between the museum and Milwaukee County stipulates that the County has responsibility for the conditions of the building and that the collections are under its legal ownership.

We are pleased that museum leadership, staff, and board are making concrete progress towards a new building. However, the completion of this major project will take several years and the risk to the collections is critical now and requires urgent action. The Milwaukee Public Museum is among the most notable and most cherished of the original natural history museums in the United States. It holds a place of high esteem in the country's history of research and public education; and has brought prominence and respect to the state of Wisconsin and the Milwaukee region for nearly 140 years. For these reasons, not just the threat to accredited status, the County and State need to respond to the threat to the collections held in trust for the public.

By the end of the tabling period we expect to see a bridge plan detailing short-term actionable steps, with implementation details and the allocation of the required resources, to ameliorate the substandard conditions impacting collections—either within the current storage areas or at an alternative storage location—so that an acceptable level of care and protection is provided until such time as the collections can be

continued

permanently relocated into a new building. In addition to the plan itself, the museum should also be able to show some demonstrated progress in the plan's implementation.

A copy of the Visiting Committee's report is enclosed, along with more information about the tabling process. As part of this process:

- ✓ The museum must submit a progress report with relevant supporting documentation to the Accreditation Program staff **on or before August 13, 2021** for review by the Accreditation Commission at our October 2021 meeting.

- ✓ We will review the museum's final report at our June 2022 meeting and make our decision regarding reaccreditation based on the progress the museum has made in addressing our concerns. A specific report due date will be assigned after we review your progress report.

If you have questions about the tabling process or the decision itself, please contact your Program Officer Danyelle Rickard at (202) 289-9106 / derrickard@aam-us.org, or Julie Hart, Senior Director for Museum Standards & Excellence at (202) 218-7712 / jhart@aam-us.org.

Sincerely yours,



Evans Richardson
Chair, Accreditation Commission
Chief of Staff, The Studio Museum in Harlem

Enclosures:

- Site Visit Report
- What You Need to Know About: The Museum's Site Visit Report
- What You Need to Know About: The Tabling Decision and Process
- Guidelines for the Institution: Tabling Action Progress and Final Reports

CC: P.J. DiStefano, Chairman of the Board
Daniel Joyce, Visiting Committee
Susannah Koerber, Visiting Committee