

ASSEMBLY, No. 1731

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

INTRODUCED MARCH 18, 1996

By Assemblymen BAGGER and ROMANO

1 AN ACT establishing a program to provide grants for history museums,
2 historical societies and historic sites, and making an appropriation.

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4 BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

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7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

8 a. The history museums of this State perform the invaluable
9 function of preserving, for present and future generations, the objects
10 that constitute the shared cultural heritage of the people of this State;

11 b. These institutions have not been properly funded, resulting in
12 grossly inadequate staffs and budgets;

13 c. All of our history museums, especially the smaller historical
14 societies, greatly need money and services to help them preserve
15 historic structures, archaeological collections, archival materials and
16 collections of fine and decorative arts--the collective treasures of our
17 State;

18 d. Due to the chronic need for funds, history museums across the
19 State currently lack resources for appropriate development,
20 preservation and educational outreach programs, and are therefore
21 underutilized in comparison to museums in neighboring states;

22 e. With greater general operating support, New Jersey's history
23 museums will be able to develop programming and exhibitions that will
24 increase the number of visitors, attract increased tourism dollars, and
25 improve New Jersey's image throughout the region;

26 f. It is desirable to provide funding and general operating support
27 for our historical institutions so that they may continue to perform the
28 essential task of preserving the treasures of this State.

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30 2. For the purpose of this act:

31 "commission" means the New Jersey Historical Commission in the
32 Department of State;

33 "general operating support" means, but is not limited to, such
34 expenses of museum operations as salaries and fringe benefits;
35 insurance; the costs of heat, electricity, and the establishment and
36 maintenance of appropriate environmental conditions in which to
37 maintain collections; payments for facility or equipment lease or rental;

1 expenses related to facility maintenance and upkeep; costs of materials
2 and supplies; expenses of staff training in museum management,
3 exhibition techniques, and presenting educational programs for the
4 public and related expenses;

5 "historic site" means a structure or a site associated with New
6 Jersey's history which is on the State or National Registers of Historic
7 Places or is eligible for the National Register, and that is owned or
8 administered by a not-for-profit New Jersey corporation or an element
9 of New Jersey's local, county or State government;

10 "historical society" means any organization of citizens working to
11 promote preservation and public knowledge of the local history of
12 New Jersey or a region, county or municipality of New Jersey and
13 having a regular museum function;

14 "history museum" means an organization which houses collections
15 of New Jersey historical material or presents historical collections to
16 the public in the form of exhibitions or educational programs and
17 makes them available for research, and does so within a museum
18 environment.

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20 3. a. There is hereby established a program within the commission
21 to offer general operating support grants to history museums,
22 historical societies and historic sites.

23 b. The commission shall develop guidelines for this program
24 consistent with the definitions utilized by this act and in consultation
25 with the New Jersey Association of Museums, the Association of New
26 Jersey County Cultural and Historic Agencies, the League of
27 Historical Societies of New Jersey, the Northern New Jersey Museum
28 Roundtable, and the Division of Parks and Forestry in the Department
29 of Environmental Protection.

30 c. The guidelines shall specify the eligibility requirements for
31 applicants, conditions under which grants will be made, and the
32 process by which the commission will review and award these grants.

33 d. The guidelines shall make provisions for grants to a variety of
34 history museums, historical societies and historic sites reflecting the
35 racial, ethnic and geographic diversity of the State.

36 e. The commission shall publicize the guidelines of this general
37 operating support grant program as widely as possible, including the
38 methods required by law for State government agencies to publicize
39 their grant programs.

40 f. The commission shall advise history museums, historical
41 societies and historic sites on the preparation of general operating
42 support grant applications, and identify a pool and select peer
43 reviewers, comprised of history museum professionals from outside
44 the State, for this grant program. The peer review panel shall make
45 recommendations to the commission for determination of grant
46 awards.

1 4. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department
2 of State for use by the commission the sum of \$2,000,000 for general
3 operating support grants for history museums, historical societies and
4 historic sites.

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6 5. This act shall take effect immediately.
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9 STATEMENT
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11 This bill creates a grant program to support the operations of the
12 history museums, historical societies and historic sites of this State.
13 The bill appropriates \$2,000,000 for these grants. The funds would be
14 distributed as grants-in-aid to history museums, historical societies and
15 historic sites dedicated to the preservation of New Jersey's history.

16 Most New Jersey history museums must contend with a cycle of
17 poverty that impedes their often heroic efforts to make the treasures
18 of New Jersey history accessible to the public. Many museums are so
19 understaffed that they are unable to fulfill their primary public trust
20 function of preserving historic structures, archaeological collections,
21 archival materials, and collections of fine and decorative arts. Lack of
22 funding limits the capabilities of many museums to mount exhibits that
23 appeal to more than a specialized audience, and to offer outreach that
24 would bring history to life for the school children of the State.

25 A recent Eagleton Institute study, *The Status of Museums in New*
26 *Jersey* reported the following grim statistics:
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28 ! Almost half (48%) of all museums in the State are without even
29 one full-time staff person. The great majority of these are
30 small, local historical societies and historic sites.
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32 ! Half of all museums struggle to operate on less than \$66,378
33 a year. Most of these institutions are small history museums.
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35 ! There is an exact correlation between staff and budget size and
36 audience appeal. The study shows that the same museums that
37 struggle to survive with no full-time professional staff and
38 annual budgets under \$66,378 cannot attract over 4,000
39 visitors a year.
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41 According to a 1991 survey commissioned by the New Jersey
42 Division of Travel and Tourism, only 4% of our visitors reported
43 visiting history museums, compared with an average of 19% in other
44 states. 34% of visitors nationwide visited interesting buildings and
45 architecture, while in New Jersey the figure was 16%-- less than half.
46

Despite our excellent museums, landmarks and architecture, only

1 28% of New Jersey visitors reported a positive perception of this
2 State's landmarks, compared with 50% of visitors to landmarks
3 nationwide. While 31% of museum-goers in all states reported
4 positive reactions, New Jersey's ratings were an abysmal 16%-- almost
5 50% worse.

6 Passage of this act should be made a priority in order to bring the
7 treasures of New Jersey history to the widest possible public. With
8 some 25% of the nation's population living within a day's driving
9 distance of New Jersey, even minor improvements in the image of the
10 State's history museums, historical societies and historic sites could
11 yield expanded audiences for our institutions, allowing New Jersey to
12 realize the great economic potential inherent in cultural tourism.

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17 Establishes grant program for State's history museums, historical
18 societies and historic sites; appropriates \$2,000,000.