



**OHIO LOCAL
HISTORY ALLIANCE**
Inspire. Connect. Educate.

Dear Governor DeWine,

We extend our thanks to you, Lt. Governor Husted and Dr. Acton for your leadership as you work to slow the spread of COVID-19 among Ohioans. The public's safety is our top concern as well. That is why we are writing to you today. We request that you please open Ohio's museums by June 15. These museums have reopening plans prepared; they can limit capacity, control physical distancing, and as studies show, they can help heal our state.

We are the Ohio Local History Alliance, a network of 384 local history groups and individuals throughout Ohio involved in collecting, preserving and interpreting Ohio's history.

Since our sites were closed in March, these entities have been creatively and boldly continuing to meet their missions by redesigning events, programs, and educational content to be carried out virtually. During this time, they have also been diligently working to accumulate PPE and educate themselves on how best to protect visitors and staff for the eventual date they reopen.

We understand that the reopening of Ohio's many businesses and organizations is daunting and complex. We have watched respectfully as many institutions, such as restaurants and retail, are able to reopen and gatherings, such as county fairs and wedding receptions of up to 300 people, are permitted to occur. Yet Ohio's museums and similar organizations remain shuttered and their events are limited to 10 people or less.

You have publicly expressed that mass gatherings are of high concern to you. Museums have plans and a strong ability to control crowd size and flow in order to ensure appropriate physical distance between visitors and staff. The determination for when our sites can reopen should not be based on attendance, but on an organization's preparedness to manage its visitation numbers.

For us, this isn't about trying to salvage admission revenues during what is left of our peak tourist season. Although it would help many of us avoid layoffs and other painful budget cuts, as well as give a boost to the state's economy, reopening is about achieving our missions. In a recent study commissioned by the American Alliance of Museums, Americans identified museums as places where they can heal and be inspired in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. Can we do this through online and virtual means? Yes. But it is not the same as being there. Said one survey respondent, *"It's about being a critical institution in our communities. This goes for folks facing hardship, but also the general mental health of community. Knowing we have places like museums to maintain our sanity is comforting in itself."* For the people who want to visit us, we are well equipped to welcome them, safely.

Thank you for your consideration.

Wendy R. Zucal
President, Ohio Local History Alliance
Executive Director, Dennison Railroad Depot Museum