

Michael's Law Testimony

Rusty Baker, Executive Director, PA Museum

Chair Daley and Chair Oberlander, members of the committee, advocates, colleagues, and friends,

My name is Rusty Baker. I am the Executive Director of PA Museums, a nonprofit museum association serving the museum community of 350 nonprofit members within a larger industry community of over 1,200 museums and historical organizations.

I am pleased to provide testimony around Michael's Law from our membership's point of view, and I appreciate hearing from others providing testimony today, particularly those with lived experiences that inform our work in designing programs and spaces in museums and historical organizations.

PA Museums fully supports Michael's Law. From a policy point of view, this legislation would represent a big step forward and put Pennsylvania in a position of leadership since most states do not have legislation like this. As an advocate for museums, our association tracks legislation in Pennsylvania. Museums stand, conveniently or not, at a crossroads of some of the important issues of our time, education, economic development, social service, and tourism. Almost a third of visitors to Pennsylvania come here to experience our rich history and culture, and over 90% of Pennsylvanians themselves engage with our cultural community annually.

The ADA has some [recommendations & considerations](#) for including complimentary admission for companions/caregivers, and many museums have taken the steps of making this a policy—mostly larger organizations like the Met, MoMA, Smithsonian, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, etc.

PA Museums, with funding support from the Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, completed a National Leadership Grant for Museums project with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission from 2019-2022. In PA Museums work with our Accessibility Excellence project to identify and remove barriers to museum access, we established a matrix of best practices around museum accessibility. Our standards include this at the "Good" level. Advocates for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access, and Justice, many of whom were included in the design and implementation of our project, see ADA requirements as just that, the required standard. Truly making progress in the direction of greater cultural accessibility requires an understanding that 1) this work is a process, 2) representation from communities will inform the goals and the speed at which change takes place, and 3) the most important action is taking the first step that will be one of many, many steps towards excellence. We believe Michael's Law will drive some organizations to take their first step.

Pennsylvania's Franklin Institute, Longwood Gardens, and the Carnegie Science Center currently show free admission for companions/caregivers on their websites. We have heard from our membership of 350 museums and historical organizations that many others, large and small, support allowing personal care assistants free access. Admission revenue, or ticket sales, for most nonprofit museums and historical organizations represents a very small part of an institution's revenue pie - there will be much bigger slices for membership, sponsorship, charitable giving, educational programs, and grants from foundations. Although admission revenue matters for museums, Michael's Law will not have a measureable negative impact on their operations.

ADA compliance, again I would emphasize as a required standard and certainly not the highest standard in service to all, remains a challenge for some museums and historical organizations. With around 1,260 museums and historical organizations active in some way in Pennsylvania, our institutions face great challenges - preserving the historical aspects of their spaces, taking care of buildings and objects that are priceless and part of our deep, sometimes complicated, sometimes beautiful heritage, providing

programs that shape the meaning of who we are as Pennsylvanians, rising up to the challenges of being the first faces many tourists see - all of these challenges must and will include a collaborative approach with communities that share the power in telling the stories of Pennsylvania.

We appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on Michael's Law, and thank you for supporting museums and public accessibility. I welcome any feedback, comments, or questions.