

February 5, 2016

To the Honorable Members of
The Illinois Senate,
99th General Assembly:

I hereby return Senate Bill 317 with specific recommendations for change to develop a sustainable fiscal model for the continued operation of the Illinois State Museum.

The Illinois State Museum preserves and showcases the proud history of Illinois. The Museum helps educate Illinoisans of all ages on their unique heritage. As a research institution, the Museum is a leader in the advancement of not only Illinois, but U.S. and natural history. I support Senate Bill 317's fundamental purpose of opening the Museum to the public again.

However, despite the good the Museum does, its operations are not fiscally sustainable. The State invests more than \$6 million per year, despite attendance of only 200,000 visitors per year. When the General Assembly failed to pass a balanced budget for Fiscal Year 2016, our Administration was required by the Illinois Constitution and our responsibility to taxpayers to take whatever steps we could to cut non-essential costs. While the State is in the midst of a crisis caused by decades of fiscal mismanagement, as long as this bill fails to offer any plan to help the Museum become self-supporting, it is just an empty and broken promise to the taxpayers of Illinois.

But there is a path to sustainability. I propose not merely re-opening the Museum while continuing its status quo, but re-energizing its operations and partnering it with other public and private entities to make it truly self-supporting and to relieve the fiscal burden to taxpayers.

In order to achieve fiscal responsibility, the Museum should partner with public and private third parties who are already invested in charitable fundraising and museum operations. The Illinois State Museum Society, authorized by statute, is a Section 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed precisely for the purpose of supporting the Museum's operations. Up until this point, the State Museum Society has run the museum bookstore and has also led its research initiatives, but the Society can and must do more. More than half of state museums in other states rely heavily on their charitable sister organizations to be a fundraising and operational partner. The Illinois State Museum Society must focus on this outward facing role and help the State Museum.

The Museum can also partner with public entities. Local governments have expressed their desire to work with the State to share the operation of Museum branch sites. The State Museum is the shared responsibility of the people of Illinois, and the State is eager to join local governments to ensure continued operation of the Museum and its branch sites.

Finally, the Museum must endeavor to raise revenues. Our neighboring states – Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin – all charge admissions fees to visitors. Illinois should take this fiscally responsible step as well. Giving the Director greater flexibility under the Act to establish and change fees will also ensure that the Illinois State Museum makes provision for special groups, like schoolchildren and the elderly, for whom admissions fees can be waived or lowered.

The changes recommended here are only the broad framework for the transformation of the Museum. The Department of Natural Resources will work closely with the Illinois State Museum Society, local governments and other stakeholders to carry out the transformation.

Therefore, pursuant to Article IV, Section 9(e) of the Illinois Constitution of 1970, I hereby return Senate Bill 317, entitled, "An ACT concerning government," with the following specific recommendations for change:

On page 1, line 5, by changing "Section 20-5" to "Sections 20-5 and 20-15"; and

On page 1, lines 8 through 10, by replacing "branch sites at Dickson Mounds, Lockport, Rend Lake, and the James R. Thompson Center" with "branch sites determined by the Department of Natural Resources in collaboration with local units of government and other public and private entities"; and

On page 1, by replacing line 17 with "for the State Museum. The Department of Natural Resources and the Board of the Illinois State Museum shall solicit the assistance of the Illinois State Museum Society to fundraise non-State resources for the museum and to provide operational assistance to the museum."; and

On page 1, immediately after line 18, by inserting the following:

“(20 ILCS 801/20-15)

Sec. 20.15. Entrance fees. The Department may set, by the Director, by administrative rule an entrance fee for visitors to the Illinois State Museum. A different fee may be charged for different classes of visitors. The fee assessed by this Section shall be deposited into the Illinois State Museum Fund for the Department to use to support the Illinois State Museum. The monies deposited into the Illinois State Museum Fund under this Section shall not be subject to administrative charges or chargebacks unless otherwise authorized by this Act. (Source: P.A. 97-1136, eff. 1-1-13.)”

With this change, Senate Bill 317 will have my approval. I respectfully request your concurrence.

Sincerely,

Bruce Rauner
GOVERNOR