

September 25, 2026

Dr. Tisa Mason, President
Dr. Jill Arensdorf, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Fort Hays State University
600 Park Street, Hays, KS 67601

Alysia Johnston, Chair, and Members of the Kansas Board of Regents
1000 SW Jackson Street, Suite 520
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Support for the Sternberg Museum of Natural History

Dear President Mason, Provost Arensdorf, and Members of the Kansas Board of Regents:

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) writes in strong support of the Sternberg Museum of Natural History and to convey our deep concern about reports that the museum may close at the end of the year. AIBS is a nonprofit scientific association dedicated to promoting informed decision-making that advances biological research and education for the benefit of science and society. Our members include scientific societies, research institutions, natural history museums, botanic gardens, biological field stations, and universities—the very community for which institutions like the Sternberg serve as essential infrastructure.

The Sternberg is one of the anchor natural history institutions of the Great Plains, and its value reaches far beyond the walls of the museum. Its holdings—more than three million paleontological, zoological, and geological specimens—are working scientific infrastructure. Researchers across the country and around the world rely on these specimens and their associated data to study how species and ecosystems respond to environmental change, to document the biodiversity of a region that helps feed the nation, and to answer questions in evolution, ecology, and Earth history that cannot be addressed without physical specimens gathered over more than a century. Each specimen is a permanent, irreplaceable record of a particular organism in a particular place and time; unlike most forms of data, it can be revisited with new tools and new questions by generations of scientists to come.

AIBS places particular emphasis on the role that institutions like the Sternberg play in education and in building the scientific workforce. The museum engages Fort Hays State University students in hands-on research, introduces thousands of K–12 students and families to science each year, and, through its field-based science camps, gives young people from rural Kansas and beyond the kind of formative experiences that draw them into careers in biology and the geosciences. A natural history museum is not only where students learn about fossils, plants, and animals; it is where a student first discovers that they themselves could become a paleontologist, an ecologist, or a botanist. That kind of experiential learning—working directly with real specimens and with the scientists who study them—is difficult to replicate in a classroom, and for many Fort Hays State University students it is the entry point

to a career in science. Closing the Sternberg would not only interrupt active research; it would foreclose these opportunities for the next generation of students, at a time when the nation needs to grow its scientific talent, not diminish it.

These collections also represent a long-term public and scientific investment. Specimens acquired, curated, and digitized over decades—often with the support of competitive federal grants—retain their value only so long as they remain properly housed and cared for by qualified professionals. Once a collection is dispersed, deaccessioned, or left without expert stewardship, the specimens and the accumulated expertise of the people who maintain them are effectively lost, and no amount of future funding can recreate them.

We recognize that Fort Hays State University faces genuine fiscal pressure, including a significant reduction in state appropriations, and that its leadership confronts difficult choices. We respectfully urge the administration of Fort Hays State University to keep the Sternberg's collections intact, accessible, and under professional care, and to weigh the full, long-term costs—scientific, educational, and reputational—of any decision that would diminish or close the museum. Sustaining the Sternberg is an investment in Kansas's research capacity, its students, and its standing in the national scientific community.

AIBS would welcome the opportunity to help connect the University, the Board, and the museum with peer institutions, professional expertise, and the broader scientific community as you explore options for a sustainable path forward.

The Sternberg Museum is a scientific and educational asset not only to Hays and to Kansas, but to the national research and education enterprise. We are hopeful that a solution can be found that secures its future, and we thank you for your leadership and stewardship of this remarkable institution.

Respectfully submitted,



Scott Glisson
Chief Executive Officer
American Institute of Biological Sciences

cc:

Eric Grospitch, Senior Advisor for Executive Operations, Fort Hays State University
Mark Arant, Dean, Werth College of Science, Technology and Mathematics, Fort Hays State University