

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Governor Newsom and Mayor Breed:

Re: Request to Authorize Museums to Reopen Safely, In Accordance with Standards for Indoor Retail and Consistent with Museum Counterparts in New York

Thank you for your exemplary leadership in protecting public health and guiding California and San Francisco's next phase of recovery. Because cooperation is critical at all levels of our state and local community, and because we know you have an impressive track record of supporting the arts in San Francisco, we are writing to you jointly.

We are writing to urge you to **advance the safe reopening of indoor museums under the "Widespread – Tier 1 (Purple)" as lower-risk industries consistent with the standards applicable to indoor retail** under both the state's "Blueprint for a Safer Economy" and under San Francisco's Order of the Health Officer No. C19-07s for the following reasons:

- **Museums are committed to public health and safety and have already demonstrated a capacity to provide a safe place for Californians to visit.**

After close collaboration with the public health officials, local museums reopened gradually and cautiously to the public in October through November 2020, restricted to 25% capacity and in full compliance with all state and local health and safety requirements. **We did not receive any reported cases of COVID-19 contracted onsite at our museums during that period, we offer a 100% contactless experience, and have safely managed thousands of visitors through timed ticketing and social-distancing protocols.** Because museums must carefully protect both visitors as well as priceless cultural artifacts, we exercise exemplary control over the volume, density, and rate of visitor flow through our ample and well-ventilated museum spaces. Our sector's safe operation during the fall reinforces that San Francisco's museums are indeed a low-risk indoor activity that can benefit local recovery efforts and contribute to public health and wellness objectives.

- **Museums are as safe as indoor retail and should be allowed to safely operate under the State's "Widespread Tier-1" order.**

Indoor museums satisfy the same risk mitigation factors as indoor retail but with lower risk environments. Inside a museum, as well as inside a retail store, individuals can wear face coverings at all times, maintain at least six feet of physical distance except for brief interactions (while paying for goods), there are no "inherently risky activities (e.g. singing, shouting, eating, drinking, etc.)," customer interactions with personnel and other households are very limited and other safety rules ensure adequate physical distancing and worker protection measures. In other words, indoor museums should be able to resume safe operations at the same reduced capacity as indoor retail. However, under San Francisco's Order of the Health Officer No. C19-07s, as updated on January 27, 2021, which reflects the State's "Widespread – Tier 1 (Purple)" requirements, "Indoor Museums" remain "suspended" while "Retail Stores for Goods" may operate at a "reduced capacity" (the lesser of 25% of maximum capacity, or number of people who can maintain at least six feet of physical distance) (See Appendix C-1). If one can shop in a mall safely, or go into an art gallery safely to buy art (or even go to a nail or hair salon), one should be able to enter a museum where there are far wider spaces, outstanding ventilation and state-of-the-art air filtration systems, fewer items to touch, minimal contacts with personnel, and equivalent health and safety protocols in place.

- **Equity is urgent, and time is of the essence to preserve jobs for our workers.**

Our museums are also at the hub of a critical cultural, social, and economic equity ecosystem. For many of us, our primary sources of earned revenue have been severely cut since March 13, 2020. We have been forced to make excruciatingly difficult decisions with broad impacts to our programs, staff, and the

community we serve. The longer museums are asked to remain dormant, the greater the likelihood further financial measures will be required. Many layoffs and furloughs have taken place already, creating serious hardships. Not only do museums provide jobs for those working inside the museum, they help support the economy all of our surrounding neighborhoods. For many, museums are not a luxury, they are a lifeline.

- **San Francisco needs museums more than ever to ensure viability and encourage people to stay here.**
Our coalition represents a broad range of scientific, cultural, artistic, and historical expertise and experiences. Museums are essential to mental health, wellness, and provide a sense of community during times of need. In the wake of regional and national tragedies and disasters such as wildfires or 9/11, San Francisco’s museums have opened their doors to support our communities. By enabling museums to reopen, you will help provide the community with much-needed safe places for education, innovation, contemplation, and inspiration, as well as for healing and community re-building. Equally importantly, you will keep our unique and vital cultural anchors in place and help retain people and businesses vital to the economic wellbeing of San Francisco and the greater State of California.
- **New York museums with far more visitors are currently open as “low-risk” indoor activity.**
Even New York City’s largest and most significant museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, with attendance that far exceeds that of many of our San Francisco museums, have been able to remain open at reduced capacity since the end of August 2020. New York’s Governor Cuomo has recognized that museums as part of a “Low-Risk Arts & Entertainment” industry that could safely remain open during the pandemic. New York, like California, has faced very challenging periods in this pandemic and has prioritized the safety of its citizens. But New York has gone farther to include the reopening of museums as part of public health objectives and local recovery efforts. We encourage California to join leaders in New York in standing behind museums as not only safe, but also uplifting, spaces for our communities during these challenging times.

Every day—every minute—counts. We would appreciate your advocacy **to advance the prompt and safe reopening of indoor museums under the current “Widespread – Tier 1 (Purple)” as soon as possible consistent with the standards applicable to indoor retail.** Like you, we care deeply about San Francisco and the public we serve in California. The heart of San Francisco lies in its vibrant and diverse culture. Museums can provide the public with a much needed socially distanced, low-risk, healing, and meaningful respite, while safely contributing to the economic recovery of our community.

Please help us open our doors together, and as soon as possible. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Neal Benezra, Director, SFMOMA
Robert J. Fisher, Chair, SFMOMA Board of Trustees

Jay Xu, Director and CEO, Asian Art Museum
Fred M. Levin, Chair, Asian Art Commission and
Asian Art Museum Foundation

Scott D. Sampson, Executive Director,
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