



Phone: (612) 625-6889 | <https://www.bellmuseum.umn.edu/>

April 8, 2025
Chair Omar Fateh
Higher Education Committee

RE: Opposition to eliminating funds for Minnesota's Natural History Museum in SF 2483 DE

Dear Chair Fateh and Committee Members,

The Bell Museum was established as **Minnesota's official natural history museum** by a state legislative mandate in 1872 to collect, preserve, display, and interpret Minnesota's diverse animal and plant life for scholarly research and teaching, and for public appreciation, enrichment, and enjoyment.

As established **by state mandate**, the Bell is Minnesota's repository for all biological collections, including birds, mammals, fishes, reptiles and amphibians, molluscs, plants, fungi, and lichens.

The Bell Museum stewards over **1.2 million plant and animal specimens** that represent **every county in Minnesota** and various locales around the globe. Our collections form the basis of knowledge of Minnesota's biodiversity, serve as an important resource for **scholarly and applied research**, and enhance formal and informal **science education**. The Bell's biological collections **serve state agencies** such as the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Department of Natural Resources. Local amateur and citizen-scientist groups, such as the Minnesota Native Plant Society, have access to the Bell resources.

Biological collections require ongoing care to maintain their **utility and accessibility** for science. The Bell Museum is committed to expanding access to this critical state resource and has invested significant effort to digitize specimens and collection records, making collections widely available through an online, searchable interface.

The state's annual investment in the Bell Museum supports **curation and accessibility** of the Bell's biological collections – namely through the support of key personnel including a Zoological Collections Manager and graduate and undergraduate curatorial assistants. The Bell Museum has responsibly stewarded this annual investment for over five decades in service to the state and our statutory mandate. We're bringing biological collections into the twenty-first century as we increase the accessibility and availability of specimens and extend their utility for research and natural resource management through DNA sequencing and 3D-imaging.

The loss of dedicated state funding will significantly impact Bell Museum collections operations and threaten our ability to deliver on our statutory obligations. We expect a reduction in staffing that would delay our ability to respond in a timely way to state agencies and reduce access to this important statewide resource. It will limit our ability to add new specimens to the collection at a time when surveillance of disease, microplastics, toxins, and heavy metals in the environment is increasingly important.

Sincerely,
Holly Menninger, PhD | Executive Director