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Illinois politicians, advocacy groups fight back as Trump cuts funding for libraries and museums

Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul and 20 attorneys general have filed a lawsuit challenging Trump’s dismantling of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. In 2024, the agency allocated \$11.3 million to Illinois museums, libraries and archives.

By [Erica Thompson](#) | Apr 9, 2025, 4:11pm EDT



DuPage Children’s Museum President and CEO Andrea J. Ingram says the Institute of Museum and Library Services allocated an \$84,000 grant to support the museum’s exhibit “The Questioners,” but the museum has yet to receive the funding. | Zubaer Khan/Sun-Times

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Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul and 20 attorneys general have filed a lawsuit challenging Trump's March 14 executive order, that called for dismantling the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Established by Congress in 1996, the agency allocated \$266.7 million in 2024 to support libraries, museums and archives, about \$11.3 million of that designated for Illinois, though some organizations say they're still waiting to receive their 2024 grants. Nearly all of the federal agency's staff has been placed on administrative leave.

The Trump administration described the action as a reduction of "unnecessary" federal bureaucracy, and the Department of Government Efficiency boasted on the social media platform X of cutting the institute's "wasteful DEI grants."

"The Institute of Museum and Library Services helps to ensure that art, culture, history and literacy are accessible for all," Raoul said . "Attempting to dismantle agencies created by Congress is a continuation of this administration's unconstitutional and unlawful overreach."

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The 's lawsuit also challenges the Trump administration's dismantling of the Minority Business Development Agency and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

Illinois organizations — including the Illinois Library Association, Illinois Association of Museums, and Museums in the Park — also support preserving the institute. They say its elimination threatens valuable cultural and educational programming and also access to books and the Internet. They say they are especially concerned about smaller museums and libraries, including those in rural and other undeserved areas, saying those would suffer most from the cuts.

The American Library Association, which is based in Chicago, disputes Trump's categorization of the federal agency as wasteful.

president. “We have 125,000 libraries in this country, and that’s more libraries than McDonald’s restaurants. That’s how prevalent and important they are. And so when we see that attacks on libraries are happening, it doesn’t make a lot of sense. Americans love their libraries.”



American Library Association President Cindy Hohl. | Courtesy of Cindy Hohl

Funding cuts put rural libraries at risk

The Illinois State Library allocated \$2.5 million to the [Illinois Heartland Library System](#) and [Reaching Across Library Systems \(RAILS\)](#), as well as \$1.8 million for support with cataloging, interlibrary loan and other services through the OCLC nonprofit. The rest of the funding went toward a variety of other training, operational and programming initiatives, including the purchase of library materials and services for the Illinois Department of Corrections.

An additional IMLS Library Services [grant of nearly \\$2.4](#) supported a variety of programming, training, research, literacy services and technology initiatives at academic institutions, individual libraries and library consortia.

IMLS said Illinois could expect to receive the same \$5.7 million grant for 2025, according to the state library.

Illinois Secretary of State and State Librarian Alexi Giannoulias said the dismantling of IMLS would be “devastating.”

“This is not just the dismantling of an agency,” he said. “It’s a downright assault on our core values as a democracy that is going to have long-lasting consequences for every community in America. Eliminating the IMLS is going to negatively impact literacy education and equal access to knowledge.”

While public libraries are predominantly funded by property taxes, advocates say the loss of IMLS funding will have a noticeable impact, especially on Illinois’ interlibrary delivery system — one of the largest in the country. Last fiscal year, about 11 million items were shared among 1,700 public, school, academic and special libraries in Illinois.

IMLS supports just a portion of that \$6.5 million annual cost, said RAILS Executive Director Monica Harris. Mailing those materials would cost about \$59 million, and purchasing them outright would cost about \$200 million.

“These are huge cost-savings through efficiencies that are built into the state,” she said. “We’re not talking about money that’s just going into a hole.”

Based in Braidwood, Fossil Ridge Public Library District is just one building, but it serves several villages and communities in Will, Kankakee and Grundy Counties. The library depends on RAILS' support to help circulate well over half a million items annually among a consortium of 130 libraries. It also provides a home-delivery service, which is valuable for homeschool parents, as well as people with disabilities and health issues.



Fossil Ridge Public Library District Executive Director Rene Leyva. | Courtesy of Rene Leyva

“We could not service our areas without RAILS fully being funded,” said Fossil Ridge Executive Director Rene Leyva. “We make deliveries five days a week. We want to continue that, but we are prepared to make cuts so that we can still continue offering the services, but that means that we also have to think about the state of the building, technologies and other services that we want to enhance that we might have to wait on.”

‘Stunting the future growth’ of museums

Central Illinois African American History Museum and the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center. The funding supported exhibitions, capacity-building efforts, collection preservation and more. The Chicago History Museum received the most funding — two grants totaling more than \$690,000 — for exhibition and conservation costs.

On top of [recent cuts in National Endowment for the Humanities funding](#), a loss of IMLS support could be a significant blow to Illinois museums.

“To take out a chunk of federally funded revenue, you’re really stunting the future growth of the museum community,” said Illinois Association of Museums president Jeanne Schultz Angel.

Naperville’s [DuPage Children’s Museum](#) is still waiting on about \$84,000 in IMLS funding to support the travel of a bilingual exhibit to Illinois public libraries. Based on Andrea Beaty’s book series “[The Questioners](#),” the exhibit promotes STEM learning.

“Right now, I have very little expectation that we will be paid on that grant,” said DuPage Children’s Museum President and CEO Andrea Ingram. “So, it puts us in a predicament of not being able to invest in this really important opportunity for kids to develop their own identities as scientists, engineers, doers, and movers and shakers. We are now going to have to just pause and figure out if we’re going to have another funding resource, or sit tight until this is all sorted out.”



Chicago students participate in the National Museum of Mexican Art's bilingual artist residency program, which was supported by funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. | Courtesy of José Ochoa

She also stressed the importance of IMLS for museums and libraries nationwide.

“I’m aghast by this,” she said. “Nobody should think this is about one \$80,000 grant in Naperville. This is about millions that go into our smallest communities.”

Another beneficiary of IMLS funding is the [National Museum of Mexican Art](#) in Pilsen. In 2023, the museum received approximately \$175,000 to help make the space accessible for for blind or low-vision visitors. The museum’s president, José Ochoa, said he was hoping to apply for additional funding to continue that work.

The museum was also awarded about \$245,000 in 2024 to support a bilingual artist residency program for students in Chicago Public Schools.

“It’s certainly frustrating, and it’s very disheartening to know that we won’t be able to rely on this sort of support for the important work that we do,” Ochoa said.



National Museum of Mexican Art President José Ochoa. | Courtesy National Museum of Mexican Art

Ochoa also cited the unique challenges the museum was facing under the Trump administration because of its name; in addition to threats to funding, he said he is concerned about keeping patrons safe from unwarranted visits from immigration agents.

“It’s lonely,” he said. “And our peer institutions have no idea what we’re going through.”

He encouraged patrons to offer financial support to their favorite libraries and museums.



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