

## NEWS

# California sues to block Trump effort to shutter federal agencies, including key museum funder

Though funding was approved by Congress, an executive order calls for the Office of Management and Budget to reject all funding requests unless the money goes toward shutting them down.



Paleontology lab volunteer Dana William Huntly works in the San Diego Natural History Museum, cleaning a more than 10-million-year-old fossil found in Otay Mesa, on Friday, Aug. 9, 2024 in San Diego. Museums like the Nat benefit from funding from a federal agency that California is now suing to stop efforts to shut down. (Alejandro Tamayo / The San Diego Union-Tribune)



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UPDATED: April 4, 2025 at 7:32 PM PDT

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California and 21 other states filed [a lawsuit](#) Friday challenging a recent Trump administration order to shut down several federal agencies, including one whose funding [has been crucial](#) for San Diego museums and other institutions.

The president's March 14 order calls for the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Minority Business Development Agency, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and four other agencies to be "eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law."

Trump said the cuts were part of his ongoing "reduction of the federal bureaucracy" efforts.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta, [in a statement](#), described the cuts as "blatantly illegal."

"The Trump Administration is once again violating the U.S. Constitution and the rule of law by attempting to unilaterally shut down agencies the President doesn't like, including agencies that give the public access to facts, knowledge, and cultural heritage for free or at low cost," Bonta said. "Dismantling these agencies would have a devastating impact on the public and on states across the nation."

Though funding for the agencies, including for the grants and programs they administer, was approved by Congress, the executive order calls for the Office of Management and Budget to reject all funding requests unless the money goes toward shutting down the agency.

This past week, at least three of the agencies suffered steep staffing cuts. At the Institute of Museum and Library Services, 85% of staff have been placed on leave. Only five people out of 40 remain at the Minority Business Development Agency. And the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service — created nearly 80 years ago to prevent and resolve work stoppages and labor disputes — was forced to lay off more than 185 people.

Among the agencies named in the executive order, the Institute of Museum and Library Services is the largest. It was created by Congress in 1996 to “advance, support and empower America’s museums, libraries and related organizations” and last year put more than \$270 million toward these goals.

San Diego organizations were awarded more than \$1.3 million in IMLS grants in 2024. The largest, \$646,000, went to the San Diego Zoological Society to develop a cryopreservation storage repository for flowering plants that can’t be preserved through traditional seed banks.

Several local tribes received grants under a program aimed at helping establish and maintain tribal libraries as part of a larger effort to preserve Native American cultures and languages.

Three Balboa Park museums, the San Diego Botanic Garden and the La Jolla Historical Society were also awarded grants last year.

Jessica Hanson York, executive director of Balboa Park’s Mingei Museum, warned in an email to members that cuts to IMLS could “devastate the only federal agency dedicated to America’s museums.”

“IMLS makes up only 0.0046% of the overall federal budget while museums, in turn, generate \$50 billion in economic benefits to the American economy and support more than 726,000 jobs,” she wrote.

Patrick Stewart, CEO of the San Diego Library Foundation, said IMLS funding has helped local libraries provide adult literacy programs, youth career development and homework assistance.

“The library is a core public service and a community cornerstone that needs to be safeguarded for our city’s future,” he said.

Following the March 14 executive order, Trump ousted IMLS acting director Cyndee Landrum and appointed Deputy Labor Secretary Keith Sonderling to head the agency.

Last week, the institute's board of directors [sent Sonderling a letter](#) warning that grants, contracts and other agreements approved by Congress "may not be discontinued or delayed under an Executive Order or other executive action."

Many of the grants awarded by IMLS are for multiyear projects and haven't been fully paid. The California State Library, which was awarded \$15.7 million last year to assist local libraries, was notified Thursday that it would not receive the remaining \$3 million of that award.

[In a statement](#), California State Library officials said IMLS funding supported vital community services, including early learning and literacy programs, summer reading initiatives and workforce development for at-risk youth.

The lawsuit argues that the U.S. Constitution doesn't give the president authority to unilaterally shutter federal agencies.

"If the President disagrees with Congress' decision to support the nation's libraries and museums and enable the peaceful mediation of labor disputes, he is free to seek legislation abolishing the agencies that perform these — and many other — vital functions," the lawsuit says.

*Originally Published: April 4, 2025 at 7:23 PM PDT*

