

# ALA, AFSCME File Lawsuit against Trump Administration

## Suit challenges the dismantling of IMLS

April 8, 2025

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**O**n April 7, the American Library Association (ALA) announced that it has filed a lawsuit, along with co-plaintiff American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), that challenges the Trump administration’s gutting of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

The [full statement \(https://www.ala.org/news/2025/04/american-library-association-afscme-challenge-trump-administration-gutting-institute\)](https://www.ala.org/news/2025/04/american-library-association-afscme-challenge-trump-administration-gutting-institute) reads as follows:

ALA, the largest library association in the world, and AFSCME, the largest union representing museum and library workers, are challenging the Trump administration’s gutting of IMLS—a nonpartisan and independent agency dedicated to supporting and funding libraries and museums and the crucial community services

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4h Sarah Landman writes: “Recently, several book rating systems devised by religious and political pressure groups are promoting ratings, book reviews, and content labels that identify many books as ‘objectionable content.’ These ratings are generally posted on websites and shared on social media. These websites are not devised by trained and degreed educators, librarians, or professional reviewers. Contributors do not consider a work’s literary or educational value for students. Yet the ratings are increasingly being used by school systems, library boards, and lawmakers as tools for censoring and banning books and other library materials.”



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they provide in every state across the country. The lawsuit (<https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/001.-2025.04.07-ALA-v.-Sonderling-Complaint.pdf>), filed on behalf of ALA and AFSCME by Democracy Forward and co-counsel Gair Gallo Eberhard LLP, asks the court to block the dismantling of IMLS as directed by a March 14 Trump administration executive order (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/>).

“Libraries play an important role in our democracy, from preserving history to providing access to government information, advancing literacy and civic engagement, and offering access to a variety of perspectives,” said ALA President Cindy Hohl. “These values are worth defending. We will not allow extremists to threaten our democracy by eliminating programs at IMLS and harming the children and communities who rely on libraries and the services and opportunities they provide.”

“Libraries and museums contain our collective history and knowledge, while also providing safe spaces for learning, cultural expression, and access to critical public resources,” said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. “They represent the heart of our communities, and the cultural workers who keep these institutions running enrich thousands of lives every day. Library workers do everything from helping people apply for jobs to administering lifesaving care, all while facing increasing violence on the job. Their work deserves support, not cuts. On behalf of the 42,000 AFSCME cultural workers, we’re suing to stop the wrongful closure of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and protect this critical resource for our communities.”

IMLS was first created and funded by Congress in 1996 and charged with supporting America’s libraries and museums. The agency has had bipartisan support throughout its history, having been reauthorized under the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, as well as the first Trump administration. IMLS is bound by laws requiring that the agency conduct certain activities to support libraries and report on important issues to Congress. The complaint argues that cutting programs at IMLS will violate the law by eliminating programs for which Congress has provided funding and has directed IMLS to undertake.

“Libraries are vital for people and communities across our nation. Attacking libraries and those who ensure the continuity of their services is yet another move by the Trump administration that does nothing to make Americans’ lives better or easier,” said Skye Perryman, president and CEO of Democracy Forward. “Reducing the IMLS workforce would undermine the agency’s ability to faithfully execute its legal obligations and harm the operations of libraries. Democracy Forward is honored to continue our work with librarians to protect these important educational institutions in our country.”

Shortly after the Trump administration’s executive order was announced, ALA sent [a letter to the new IMLS acting director \(https://www.ala.org/news/2025/03/ala-warns-new-imls-acting-director-not-cut-programs-required-law\)](https://www.ala.org/news/2025/03/ala-warns-new-imls-acting-director-not-cut-programs-required-law), warning against cutting any programs at the agency that are protected by law.

This case continues Democracy Forward’s record of working with communities, parents, and libraries to defend the freedom to read. That work has previously included efforts in [Arkansas \(https://democracyforward.org/updates/win-for-librarians-arkansas-law-censoring-struck-down/\)](https://democracyforward.org/updates/win-for-librarians-arkansas-law-censoring-struck-down/), where Democracy Forward represented a coalition of librarians, booksellers, and readers who successfully prevented portions of an Arkansas law that threatens to criminalize librarians and booksellers from taking effect and is asking the court to permanently stop the law from being enforced; [Florida \(https://democracyforward.org/updates/florida-anti-censorship-petition/\)](https://democracyforward.org/updates/florida-anti-censorship-petition/), where Democracy Forward represented the Florida Education Association, Florida Freedom to Read Project, and Families for Strong Public Schools to challenge actions by Gov. Ron DeSantis’s administration that shutter classroom libraries and undermine public education in Florida; and in [Alabama \(https://democracyforward.org/work/alabama-families-and-librarians-sue-to-challenge-censorship-policies-that-take-books-off-library-shelves/\)](https://democracyforward.org/work/alabama-families-and-librarians-sue-to-challenge-censorship-policies-that-take-books-off-library-shelves/), where Democracy Forward is representing a group of Alabama families and librarians with a broad array of political and religious backgrounds in a suit to stop policies approved by the library board that threaten to keep constitutionally protected books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* off of public library shelves.

Read the full complaint [here \(https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/001.-2025.04.07-ALA-v.-Sonderling-Complaint.pdf\)](https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/001.-2025.04.07-ALA-v.-Sonderling-Complaint.pdf).

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