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## **Libraries are under attack at the federal level, but Monterey County Free Libraries director remains optimistic.**

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Monterey County Free Libraries Director Hillary Theyer.

American libraries are under threat, thanks to DOGE, the Department of Government Efficiency led by Elon Musk and created by President Donald Trump's White House. Cuts are taking place across federal agencies and institutions.

The niche but important Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington, D.C., is a small department created by Congress in 1996 to distribute grants for libraries and museums in the U.S. In the first days of April, all staff at the Institute were put on hold. That could affect libraries across the nation.

California, Connecticut and Washington received the first termination notices for state library grants, as CBS News reported on April 4. The California State Library, which financially supports local libraries, was notified that a key federal grant has been terminated. It's a loss of at least \$3 million that was previously awarded.

What about Monterey County Free Libraries (MCFL)? Will the local system be affected?

Not yet, according to MCFL Director Hillary Theyer.

"While MCFL's core operations remain strong, some internal changes are already underway. You have already seen changes in printing and faxing services, for example," she wrote in a letter to library patrons on April 5, spurred by concern expressed from library patrons.

"Events are changing rapidly, and though our direct local funding from property taxes is not under direct threat due to federal or state actions, and provides the bulk of what operates your libraries, changes at the state and federal level can and will impact what we are able to offer at MCFL."

Founded over 100 years ago, MCFL is funded chiefly by local property taxes. The system's budget is decided by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors; the 2025-26 fiscal year's budget hearing take place in May.

Current changes in funding, via the California State Library and Institute of Museum and Library Services, can affect programs such as: Adult Literacy, Lunch at the Library, internal connection of all public libraries (CalREN), Career Online High School, the Palace e-book app, portions of the summer reading program, an online training portal for public library staff and the Braille and Talking Books Library.

Online resources funded by the State Library will be available through the summer but their future is unknown. Summer Reading and Lunch at the Library are funded for summer 2025.

MCFL also relies on a federal program under the Universal Service Fund called e-rate for substantial telecommunications discounts.

Fortunately, MCFL also benefits from local support groups and organizations. These include the Foundation for Monterey County Free Libraries and Friends of the Libraries groups at many of the system's 16 branches.

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