



EDUCATION GOVERNMENT

# State Library faces Trump threat to federal funding after escaping the Noem knife

Museums also concerned about impact of presidential executive order

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 4, 2025 2:46 PM



📷 South Dakota librarians watch a debate from the gallery of the state Senate in Pierre on March 10, 2025. (Joshua Hair/South Dakota Searchlight)

The Trump administration’s move to gut a library-supporting federal agency could make a victory for backers of the South Dakota State Library short-lived.

Last year, State Library advocates [were aghast](#) at a budget plan from then-Gov. Kristi Noem that would’ve hollowed out the Pierre-based organization, which operates under the umbrella of the state Department of Education.

The Legislature **softened** the cuts during its annual lawmaking session that ended earlier this month, keeping the State Library alive and eligible for a federal grant that funds much of the organization's budget.

Then, the day after lawmakers went home in mid-March, President Donald Trump **signed an executive order** directing the head of the Institute for Museum and Library Services, or IMLS – which provides the grant – to cut its operations to the “maximum extent allowable by law.”

That has State Library advocates worried about its future again.

## Legislative committee softens budget blow to SD State Library, but concerns remain



South Dakota's main legislative budget committee softened the proposed cuts to the State Library on Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre, but library advocates still have concerns. The Joint Committee on Appropriations endorsed House Bill 1041 in a 16-2 vote, with the two votes against it coming from Reps. Erik Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, and Scott ... Continue

Among other duties, the State Library handles interlibrary loans, pays for databases that are accessible at no cost through any public library in the state, provides support for summer reading programs and organizes professional development workshops. It also offers Braille and talking book services for readers with disabilities.

Noem's budget plan, unveiled in December, would have **pared down every piece** of the State Library's operations except those last two items. The proposed cuts were deep enough to dash about \$1.3 million in federal matching dollars from the IMLS. That money, on top of the state's \$1 million contribution, was enough to fund the State Library's border-to-border operations and pay its 21 employees.

Noem wasn't around to fight for her proposal, however. She left the state to take a job as head of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security before state lawmakers dug into the details of her budget.

The Legislature **ultimately worked with** the administration of her successor, Gov. Larry Rhoden, to fashion a compromise that spared

the jobs of all but 3.5 State Library employees.

The \$850,000 in state funding approved in the deal with the state Education Department was enough to preserve IMLS grant funding, even as the Legislature dissolved the citizen board that oversees the State Library. Summer reading program support, training for librarians and most of the databases were saved in the deal.

Nancy Van Der Weide, the Education Department's spokeswoman, said databases from EBSCO, World Book, BookFlix, Peterson's Test Prep, SIRS Issues Research, Discoverer, Research Library, U.S. Newsstream, and CultureGrams will remain available to South Dakota citizens through the State Library.

### State unsure about impact of Trump action

The IMLS dollars that buoy South Dakota's State Library serve similar purposes in every state. Grants from the organization also support curation and collection management activities at museums and local libraries.

Congress last authorized IMLS grant funding in 2018, during President Donald Trump's first term in office. There's money available through the 2025 federal fiscal year, which began Oct. 1.

Trump's order gave the agency a week to craft a plan to comply with the edict. IMLS Acting Director Keith E. Sonderling has already placed all employees of IMLS on administrative leave.

South Dakota's State Library has its funding in hand from federal fiscal year 2024, according to Van Der Weide.

The department "is waiting on a grant award for FY 2025," she wrote, referring to the current round of funding.

Congress authorized grant funding through FY 2025, she said. But as a department, Van Der Weide said, "we do not have a clear indication" as to the impact of the Trump executive order.

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#### DOGE in SD

For more about the impact of federal firings, funding freezes, spending cuts and grant cancellations, see Searchlight's [DOGE in SD](#) page.

On Friday, the attorneys general of New York and Rhode Island and 18 other states – but not South Dakota – [filed a lawsuit](#) in federal court seeking to stop what they called the “targeted destruction” of the IMLS and two other agencies targeted by Trump. The lawsuit alleges that the president illegally overrode the power of Congress to decide how federal funds are spent.

### Library group reaction, union concerns

The congressional authorization is some comfort to Elizabeth Fox, head of the South Dakota Library Association. That group’s membership rallied opposition to Noem’s proposed cuts, both before and during the legislative session.

The words “allowable by law” in the Trump order and the knowledge that another year of federal grant money is written into the law helped calm – for her, at least – some of the “more extreme” reactions that followed news of the IMLS targeting.

### Trump order would gut agency that gives library grants to SD



WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s move late Friday to dismantle the agency that serves as the primary federal funding source for libraries and museums nationwide prompted questions over the weekend about how the agency can

continue to carry out its core work. After Trump signed an executive order Friday that called for severe reductions in cover... Continue

Fox was thinking about the next round of IMLS funding long before Noem’s December budget address. Every five-year funding cycle for the federal agency represents a moment of action for library advocates around the nation, Fox said.

“We have known for a year now that we were looking at getting that renewed,” Fox said. “We knew we were going to be having this discussion.”

Others remain concerned, especially after the news on administrative leave for IMLS staff. That move is likely to complicate the agency’s performance of its statutory obligations, according to a federal employees union called the American Federation of Government Employees.

“In the absence of staff, all work processing 2025 applications has ended,” the group’s local chapter wrote in a statement to South Dakota Searchlight. “The status of previously awarded grants is unclear. Without staff to administer the programs, it is likely that most grants will be terminated.”

### Museum director: IMLS director statement ‘terrifying’

Conor McMahan heads the Journey Museum in Rapid City. His organization got \$50,000 from IMLS a few years ago to help fund an exhibit on the historic, deadly Rapid City floods of 1972.

The federal agency also serves as a funding source for unglamorous museum necessities like new shelving, McMahan said. That’s a topic the Journey director expects to broach with the Rapid City Council in the coming months to deal with a dearth of space in the organization’s building.

#### Trump’s firings reach into a Rapid City museum and derail an expert’s career



There aren’t many people in the U.S. who do what Angela Watts does. There were fewer than 13,000 who worked in museum curation in 2023, according to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Only 330 of them were federal, state or local government employees. From

mid-December until Feb. 14 — a ... Continue reading

“If the city doesn’t fund this, IMLS would have been our second source,” McMahan said.

The Trump administration’s administrative leave order for IMLS employees was set for 90 days. Even if those employees return to work at the end of 90 days, or at the order of a federal judge, McMahan is not encouraged by a statement from Sonderling, the IMLS acting director. Sonderling is also the deputy secretary for the Department of Labor. [Sonderling said](#) he’s committed to “revitalize IMLS and restore focus on patriotism, ensuring we preserve our country’s core values, promote American exceptionalism and cultivate love of country in future generations.”

To McMahan [and other museum and library advocates](#) around the country, that sounds like a pledge to politicize the work of

preserving and maintaining the nation’s history and culture.

For museum curators and library professionals who aim to offer an honest, unvarnished and nuanced perspective to the public, McMahan said, “I don’t think you could find a more terrifying statement than that.”

*EDITOR’S NOTE: This story has been updated with the addition of information about a lawsuit filed since the story’s initial publication.*



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John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

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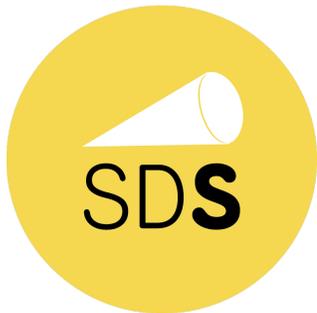
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