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Maine libraries brace for cuts as federal funding faces threat

Library directors in Farmington and Kingfield warn that proposed federal cuts could jeopardize essential services used by patrons statewide.

Communities: **Farmington, Kingfield**

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Farmington and Kingfield librarians speak out about the potential impact of federal funding cuts on vital library services. Pictured: Farmington Public Library, which could be affected if IMLS-supported programs are reduced or eliminated. *File photo/Franklin Journal*

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REGION — A March 14 executive order by President Donald Trump calling for the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services has sparked alarm across Maine’s library community, with local directors warning of significant consequences for public access, digital resources and interlibrary collaboration.

“Right now, my library, like many libraries in Maine, is still trying to understand the full impact of the March 15th executive order and potential cuts to the IMLS,” said Julia Bouwsma, director of the Webster Library in Kingfield. “LSTA [Library Services and Technology Act] funding provides significant federal funding to the Maine State Library for a variety of services including: internet service and technical support for 243 public libraries in Maine [including Webster Library], e-books and audiobooks, the statewide interlibrary loan system, and talking books and large print book services for the visually impaired.”

The order instructs the Office of Management and Budget [OMB] to reject any IMLS budget requests beyond funds needed to shut down the agency. Although Congress approved level funding through September 2025, the executive action directs IMLS to reduce staff and services to the minimum required by law.

According to the American Library Association, the agency is not eliminated outright, a move that would exceed executive authority, but the order aims to dismantle it “to the maximum extent of the law.”

The Maine Library Association [MLA] responded in opposition of the executive order. A March MLA press release noted the elimination of IMLS would negatively impact all Mainers who rely on library services. In fiscal year 2024, Maine received \$1,53 million in LSTA funds. The FY25 request is for \$214 million nationally, with a similar allocation expected for Maine.

MLA warned that cutting federal support would jeopardize critical services in the state, including:

- Free gigabit internet to 243 public libraries via the Maine School and Library Network.
- Interlibrary loan access to more than 10 million items across 260 libraries.
- CloudLibrary's statewide e-book and e-audiobook collection.
- Large print and recorded books for visually impaired residents.
- Professional development and technology support.
- Access to databases via Digital Maine Library.
- The Books by Mail program and Maine InfoNet resource sharing system.

"As a part-time library director for a small rural library, I'm currently trying to do a lot of legwork to expand my own understanding of relevant policy," Bouwsma said. She plans to attend the Maine Library Association's Legislative Day in Augusta April 9 to advocate for continued funding.

In Farmington, Public library director Jessica Casey said that while her library doesn't directly receive IMLS funding, the potential losses to shared services are daunting.

"We benefit from free, fast internet service through the Maine School and Library Network, and many people come to the library regularly to use our public access computers or connect to our Wi-Fi," Casey said.

"Obviously we cannot operate without internet, so we would have to struggle to find a way to deal with the added expense."

She added that the library would be hard-pressed to afford direct subscriptions to resources like CloudLibrary and online databases if state contracts were lost. "Ebook and e-audiobook licenses are incredibly expensive for libraries," she said. "We certainly would not be able to provide such a robust digital collection to our patrons with solely our own collection funds."

Casey warned that if IMLS support is withdrawn, libraries across Maine may be forced to make painful decisions. "If these services have to be cut back or eliminated ...

there will likely be significant changes we will have to face in the Maine library community,” she said. “We might be forced to pick and choose services to prioritize, which will be difficult because so much of what we do is essential to our communities.”

While most library funding in Maine comes from local sources, MLA emphasized that federal dollars ensure equitable service across rural and underfunded regions. “Federal funding for libraries accounts for just 0.003% of the overall federal budget,” their statement noted, “but this incredibly modest investment ensures that all communities have access to essential library services regardless of local funding capacity.”

Casey said she’s uncertain how libraries will move forward. “To be honest, I’m not sure what is going to happen and how we’re going to navigate it,” she said. “We are lucky in Farmington to have many library supporters, so hopefully our community, and the larger Maine community as well, can band together to advocate for the continuation of federal funding for libraries.”

Bouwsma expressed appreciation for efforts to raise awareness about the issue and emphasized the importance of bringing attention to the potential impact on Maine libraries.

The MLA is calling on Mainers to contact their congressional delegation to oppose the executive order and uphold Congress’s role in funding decisions, including continued support for Grants to States funding.

For more information on the executive order and its potential impact, visit:

[American Library Association FAQ on Executive Order](#)

[Maine Library Association Statement](#)

[Maine State Library LSTA Fact Sheet](#)

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