

FEDERAL

# Trump Admin. Cuts Library Funding. What It Means for Students

By [Jennifer Vilcarino](#) — March 19, 2025 ⌚ 5 min read

President Donald Trump signs an executive order in the Oval Office at the White House, Monday, Feb. 10, 2025, in Washington.  
— Alex Brandon/AP

*Correction: A previous version of this article had a different date of establishment for the Institute of Museum and Libraries. IMLS was established in 1996.*

In an executive order last week, the Trump administration mandated the reduction of seven agencies, including one that funds libraries around the country: the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

The [executive order](#) gave the agencies seven days to eliminate to the “maximum extent” non-statutory components and functions and to provide a report to the director of the Office of Management and Budget confirming compliance and outlining which aspects of the agency are necessary to keep.

More than a dozen organizations, including the [American Library Association \(ALA\)](#), [EveryLibrary](#), and the [Chief Officers of State Library Agencies](#) have released statements rejecting the decision, which they say could jeopardize literacy development and reading programs, reliable internet access for those without it at home, and homework help and other resources for students and educators.

These services in the community are especially valuable, advocates say, considering that 3 out of 10 school districts nationwide did not have a full-time or part-time school librarian during the 2020-21 school year, based on a [2024 School Librarian Investigation: Divergence & Evolution \(SLIDE\) report](#) .

“By eliminating the only federal agency dedicated to funding library services, the Trump administration’s executive order is cutting off at the knees the most beloved and trusted of American institutions and the staff and services they offer,” [said the press release by the ALA](#).

## History of the Institute of Museum and Library Services

In 1966, the [Museum and Library Services Act](#) established the Institute of Museum and Library Services. This law held that a portion of federal funds would go to state libraries through the Grants to States program and other programmatic grants.

In 2018, Congress passed a bipartisan bill that [updated the agency’s](#) Grants to States program. This bill, signed by President Donald Trump in his first term, established a minimum amount of state funding for libraries, usually determined by state population.

Today, the agency funds 125,000 public, school, academic, and special libraries across the country, according to the ALA press release.

IMLS funding in 2024 was \$266.7 million—0.003 percent of the federal budget, and 75 cents per capita, said Cindy Hohl, the ALA president.

“I would definitely say that Americans are worth 75 cents each,” she said.

## Interpretation of Trump's executive order remains murky

While the executive order mandated the agency eliminate unnecessary programs and their personnel, some argue that many of the agency's functions are enshrined in law.

John Chrastka, the executive director of EveryLibrary, a non-profit organization that advocates for libraries across the country, said the main funding stream for IMLS, the Grants to States program, should be considered statutory as it was written using "shall" in the Museum and Library Services Act of 2018.

The budgets of other programs under IMLS, such as the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program, are usually determined by the annual congressional appropriations process and were written into the 2018 law using "may," and therefore, could be considered discretionary, Chastka said.

However, Chrastka believes that since Congress passed a federal budget resolution on Friday—the same day the executive order regarding IMLS was announced—and Trump signed the budget into law on Saturday, any programmatic funding approved should be considered statutory as well.

"The continuing resolution has current year funding for grantees and contracts and awards, and that that needs to be followed by OMB," said Chrastka.

## What do state libraries do for K-12 students?

State libraries provide supplemental materials for smaller, local libraries through their interlibrary loan system, which is an additional resource for K-12 schools. At the local level, state libraries provide their community with resources like internet access or meals during summer break.

"Libraries have always had a good reputation, [a] bipartisan [one]—both Republicans and Democrats have always felt libraries are a good thing," said Debra Kachel, a researcher at Antioch University, who studies K-12 school libraries and funding. "It helps to educate our citizenry. It helps people to be able to qualify for good jobs that make money."

However, libraries have become the subject of partisan attacks in recent years, especially with challenges to books about race, gender, and sexuality in the political spotlight.

As a result, some critics of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts support Trump's executive order to reduce the IMLS, arguing that the agency funds DEI initiatives.

## What happens to libraries now?

While the executive order does not explicitly shut down the agency, the shortage of funding could have detrimental consequences for many students, particularly those in rural areas, said Sara L. Hartman, a former teacher and currently an editor at the Rural Educator journal with the National Rural Education Association.

"[Libraries] bring access to educational opportunities that children in rural areas don't always have access to," Hartman said.

For example, Maine, a mostly rural state, has received a total of about \$51 million from IMLS, said Lori Fisher, the state librarian. Of that funding, 61 percent has gone to Maine's state library to provide statewide services such as the creation of a database of articles, books, and other educational resources, and to assist smaller libraries by setting up library catalogs.

"[IMLS] is an important source of funding that really creates more equity across our libraries and our communities in the state as far as access—that's the biggest thing," said Fisher.

Trump's order could also affect IMLS' programmatic grants. For example, Kachel and other volunteers at the Philadelphia Alliance to Restore School Librarians (PARSL) were recipients of the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program in 2024 and therefore were awarded funds to carry out a project. They have been working with school districts in Philadelphia to bring back school library services to the students.

"We're already seven months into this two-year project. We're hoping that funding continues to the end of our project," said Kachel. "\$150,000 is nothing in the federal budget, but when you bring it home to actual projects that impact kids and teachers and schools like this one ... we could make a huge impact bringing back school librarians and libraries to these schools."



## Jennifer Vilcarino

Digital News Reporter, Education Week

Jennifer Vilcarino is a digital news reporter for Education Week.

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