

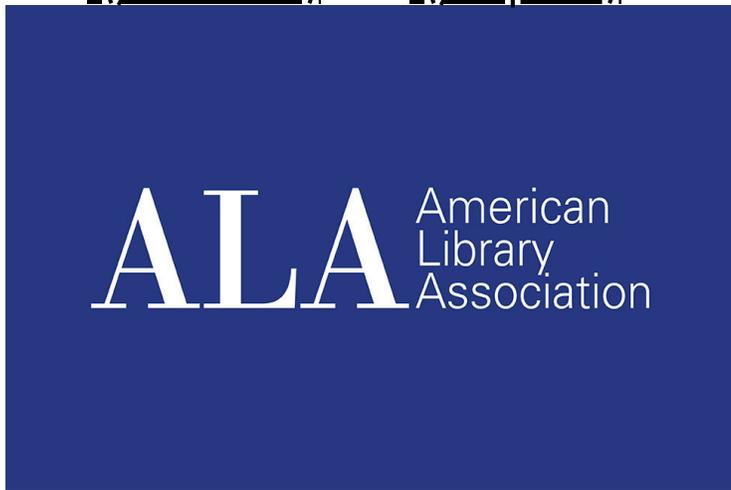
White House Attacks Libraries

How ALA is responding to Trump's executive order

By Alan S. Inouye [\(https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/authors/alan-s-inouye/\)](https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/authors/alan-s-inouye/)

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On the evening of March 14, President Trump launched an assault on libraries by signing the executive order titled [Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/) [\(https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/). This order, which targets the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) along with six other agencies, is not simply a matter of concern—it is a five-alarm fire.

Underneath the Trump administration's bureaucratic language is the clear intent to take away states' funding to support their libraries. The president cannot fully eliminate IMLS without

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congressional approval, but his order takes every possible step in that direction. The order calls for the elimination of IMLS, by limiting budget requests from the agency to only the funds needed to shut it down. Otherwise, the administration, through its Office of Management and Budget, will “reject funding requests.” This means we will see this shutdown budget reflected in the president’s fiscal year (FY) 2026 budget proposal to Congress, which is expected in the next several weeks.

(<http://americanlibrariesbuyersguide.com/>).

Additionally, the White House is attempting to constrain current FY2025 operations. The continuing appropriations law for FY2025 that Congress passed and Trump signed—also on March 14—includes funding for IMLS to continue its vital programs this year at the same level as FY2024. But the executive order now limits funding to only those programs that are “statutorily required”—in other words, programs mandated by law. It is far from clear how the White House will ultimately interpret “statutorily required,” much less how it may direct IMLS to implement their interpretation. In public policy, the execution of policy is just as impactful as the development of policy.

On March 15, ALA responded to the executive order with a [statement \(https://www.ala.org/news/2025/03/ala-statement-white-house-assault-institute-museum-and-library-services\)](https://www.ala.org/news/2025/03/ala-statement-white-house-assault-institute-museum-and-library-services), reading in part: “Americans have loved and relied on public, school, and academic libraries for generations. 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.”

Fighting for our libraries

While the executive order is undoubtedly urgent, it was also expected. In his first term, Trump proposed to eliminate IMLS in all four of his annual budget proposals. The actions and rhetoric since the 2024 elections reinforced the expectation that the administration would attempt to shutter IMLS. Anticipating this trajectory, ALA established the [Show Up for Our Libraries \(https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries\)](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries) campaign, launched a related [webinar series \(https://elearning.ala.org/local/catalog/view/product.php?productid=1489\)](https://elearning.ala.org/local/catalog/view/product.php?productid=1489), and bolstered our policy and legal [resources \(https://www.ala.org/advocacy/federal-resources\)](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/federal-resources) on Capitol Hill.

(For more information, visit the [ALA website for an FAQ \(https://www.ala.org/faq-executive-order-targeting-impls\)](#) on the executive order.)

The good news is there is a groundswell of opposition to Trump's order. Since ALA's March 15 statement, more than 55,000 messages have been recorded and sent to Congress members through ALA's [action center \(https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries\)](#). ALA urges everyone to tell their senators and representatives to reject the president's executive order and support continued funding for IMLS in the FY2026 budget. Go to our [Protect Library Funding \(https://app.oneclickpolitics.com/campaign-page?cid=9CyapZUB9sorxFLO4Joc&lang=en\)](#) page to customize a letter template with your own story about how libraries have contributed to your community.

Over the coming weeks, supporters can also find information at [Show Up for Our Libraries \(https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries\)](#) on hosting Congress members for a library tour and supporting ALA's advocacy efforts through donations.

In addition to grassroots advocacy, ALA is opposing this executive order in a number of ways. ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy Office (PPAO) is exploring possible policy and legal responses to the executive order. ALA's Congressional Fly-In will be held April 2–3. Anchored by our leadership—ALA President Cindy Hohl, Interim Executive Director Leslie Burger, Committee on Legislation Chair Ed Garcia, and President-Elect Sam Helmick—experienced library advocates will meet with congressional offices focused on library appropriations. With the release of the executive order and what it means for Trump's FY26 budget request, their marching orders are clear: Tell the story of the value of libraries and IMLS.

On April 11, during National Library Week (April 6–12), PPAO will present the fourth webinar in its Show Up for Our Libraries series, [“How to Protect Federal Library Funding \(https://elearning.ala.org/local/catalog/view/product.php?productid=1489\).”](#) In honor of National Library Week, this webinar will be open to the public.

As we focus on the public policy and advocacy aspects of this latest development, let us remember that there is a direct human toll. You can guess how the employees of IMLS must be feeling at this time, with the heightened uncertainty about their futures. We've all seen the news about the unjustified, ill treatment of federal employees

across many agencies, and now it has come squarely to the library community. ALA asks you to keep the welfare of IMLS employees in your thoughts and to support them if you can.

There's no denying that the months ahead will be challenging, but there is also a pathway to fight back. We have a chance to successfully defend against the attack on libraries, but only if the library community and our allies work together and deliberately.

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