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**US politics** // News

# Union and association representing museum and library workers sue Trump administration

The American Library Association and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees are suing to block the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services

**Benjamin Sutton**

8 April 2025



US President Donald Trump during an event at the White House in 2019

Official White House Photo by Tia Dufour, [via Flickr](#)

The US's largest union of museum and library workers and the largest library association in the world are suing President Donald Trump's administration to block its efforts to dismantle the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The lawsuit was filed on behalf of the American Library Association (ALA) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) by the non-profit organisation Democracy Forward and the law firm Gair Gallo Eberhard.

The lawsuit accuses the Trump administration of taking “unlawful actions” to dismantle IMLS, claiming that that the administration's actions “threaten libraries, museums and the millions of people who rely on them across the nation”. It was filed in district court in Washington, DC on Monday (7 April) and names Trump; IMLS and its acting director Keith Sonderling; the Department of Government Efficiency (Doge) and its acting administrator Amy Gleason; the US office of Management and Budget and its director Russel Vought as defendants. Among other relief, ALA and AFSCME are asking the court to issue “a permanent injunction barring Defendants from taking any action to dissolve IMLS absent the authorisation of Congress”.

“Libraries and museums contain our collective history and knowledge, while also providing safe spaces for learning, cultural expression and access to critical public resources,” Lee Saunders, the president of AFSCME—which represents workers at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and others—said in a statement [↗](#). “They represent the heart of our communities, and the cultural workers who keep these institutions running enrich thousands of lives every day. Library workers do everything from helping people apply for jobs to administering lifesaving care all while facing increasing

violence on the job. Their work deserves support, not cuts.”

Spokespersons for IMLS could not be reached for comment.

On 14 March, Trump issued an executive order that described IMLS and six other federal agencies as “unnecessary” and mandated that they “be eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law”. Subsequently, according to the sequence of events outlined in the lawsuit, members of Doge visited IMLS’s headquarters near the National Mall in Washington, DC, placed the entire staff of 70 on administrative leave and cut off their access to digital systems and their office. (Subsequently, a “handful” of staff were reinstated.)



**US politics**

## **National Endowment for the Humanities cancels grants as Trump administration redirects agency’s resources**

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All but 12 IMLS staffers received termination notices on 3 April. The following day, Sonderling fired the 23 members of the National Museum and Library Services Board—who, on 24 March, had sent him a letter stating that many of IMLS’s activities “cannot be paused, reduced or eliminated without violating Congressional intent and federal statute”.

In addition to ALA and AFSCME’s lawsuit, the Trump administration is being sued by 21 states’ attorneys general over its attempt to eliminate IMLS. The agency, along with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), is one of the largest conduits for federal arts funding in the US. Like the NEA and NEH, IMLS’s funding comes in the form of annual appropriations that are decided by Congress; IMLS’s appropriation for fiscal year 2024 was \$294.8m. Last year, IMLS disbursed \$266.7m in grants to libraries, museums and related institutions throughout the US and its territories.

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