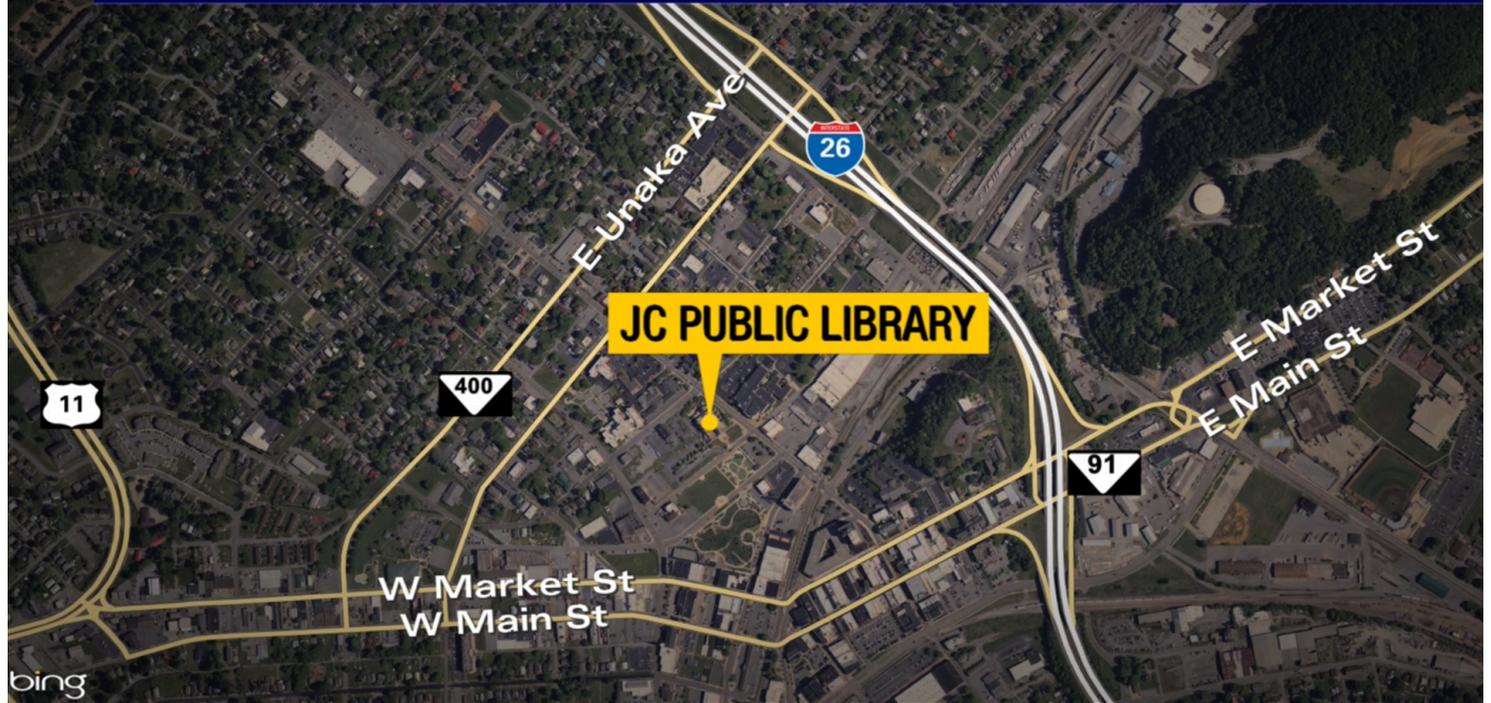


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LOCAL

Federal library grants' future uncertain after Trump order

by: [Jeff Keeling](#)
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JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. (WJHL) — Some federal funding to local libraries could be in jeopardy after a mid-March executive order by President Donald Trump — including funds many smaller libraries rely on heavily to add to their collections.

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“We’re hearing from colleagues around the country that they’ve been getting notifications, that the state grants have been canceled,” Johnson City Public Library (JCPL) Director Julia Turpin told News Channel 11 Monday.

Turpin was talking about Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grants. Awards from that federal, Congressionally-created agency usually go to states and are then disbursed to local libraries, though some libraries also get direct grants.

Among other things, JCPL uses the funds to bolster its titles in the popular “Libby” app, which hosts “Tennessee Reads,” a statewide collection of digital content through which patrons can check out e-books and other digital materials. Turpin said Libby accounted for 30% of JCPL checkouts last year.

“For many of our state’s smaller libraries, in particular, this is their collections budget,” Turpin said of that IMLS funding stream. “They don’t have local funds available to purchase materials, so they’re waiting until those federal dollars are released and they can purchase in the fall every year.”

Trump's March 14 Executive Order, under the title of "Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy," called for the elimination of seven federal agencies, including IMLS, "to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law."

The future of that order remains uncertain, with effects for some agencies already in the court system, and Turpin said libraries haven't yet gotten clear guidance at the state level about the status of grants for the current fiscal year that ends June 30, or about the program's future starting July 1.

That's likely because the state librarian, who works within Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett's office, isn't sure yet how the order will play out. Congress created IMLS, and Congress recently approved funding for the remainder of the fiscal year. In fiscal year 2023, IMLS funding for Tennessee totaled just over \$3.6 million.

For JCPL, one possibility in the wake of the order is that more than \$13,000 in grant money the library was awarded – and has already spent on upgrading its public computers, Wi-Fi and network – won't end up getting reimbursed.

"We've submitted it," Turpin said of the tech grant, which . It might come through and again for us we have the fund balance to carry us through if we have to."

The library had already received an IMLS lump sum of nearly \$7,000 to add to its collection earlier this fiscal year. Those funds helped expand access to Libby titles and shorten wait are sometimes months-long wait times for patrons.

"I've spoken with colleagues around the state, and for some of them, this might be half of their collections budget, it might be two-thirds of it, or it could even potentially be all of their collections budget in any given year," Turpin said. "For Johnson City, it's a smaller amount, but we still use that money to purchase these very expensive materials."

She said "power readers," who consume literature voraciously, probably save several hundred dollars a year by using the library for their Libby titles.

Turpin said JCPL has a lot of local support, and that the city and other non-federal sources could likely backfill the funding, both for the current year and probably for next year if necessary. She said smaller communities may not have that luxury.

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"Other libraries that are really counting on getting this reimbursement, this is huge for them," she said. "We're going into the summer reading program, so they need that reimbursement so they can pay for the additional supplies, performers and all the things that go into that, so this will have a major effect on our smaller library neighbors."

Six days after the executive order, Trump appointed Keith Sonderling as acting director of IMLS. In a release on the IMLS website, Sonderling said he would steer IMLS "in lockstep with this Administration to enhance efficiency and foster innovation." He added that a revitalized IMLS will

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"We've been fielding a lot of questions about how folks can get involved, what they can do to support our public libraries," Turpin said. "We're encouraging folks just to reach out to your legislators and let them know what your public library means to you and how you want your federal dollars spent."

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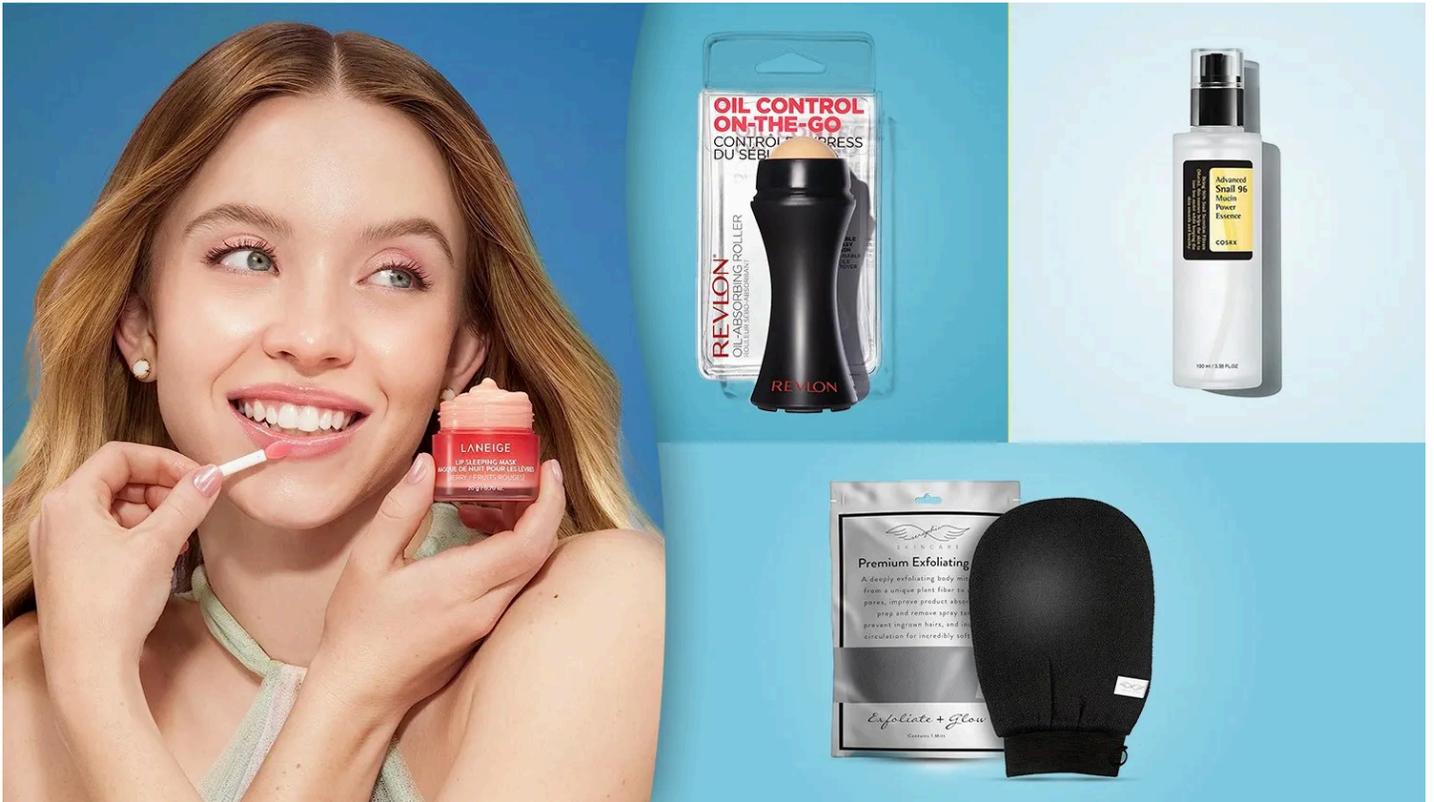
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