

BOOKS | POLITICS

A Trump Executive Order is Hitting the Dallas Public Library Where it Hurts

Dallas' libraries have relied on the slashed funding to start the GED Testing Center and English language learning classes.

By Emma Ruby | April 8, 2025



You've heard of trickle-down economics, but what about trickle-down budget cuts? **Dylan Hollingsworth**

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Dallas Public Library officials say the effort to digitize hundreds of **artifacts associated with Juanita Craft**, a civil rights leader and former Dallas City Council member, is on pause due to federal funding cuts.

On March 14, **President Donald Trump issued an executive order** dismantling “elements of the

Federal bureaucracy that the President has determined are unnecessary.” Among the federal agencies eliminated in the order was the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a small department that awards grant funding to museums and libraries nationally. The entire IMLS staff was placed on administrative leave last week.

According to a Dallas city memo filed Friday, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission relies on the federal agency for 33%, or \$12.5 million, of its annual funding.

The memo states that the sudden funding freeze has caused the Texas State Library and Archives Commission to indefinitely pause expenditures on state grants. Dallas Public Libraries had been relying on a \$35,674 grant from the commission to fund the Juanita Craft digitization project, which will forever preserve 37.5 cubic feet worth of artifacts online.

“It’s possible that [the grant] may be restarted before the end of the state’s fiscal year, but it’s just unclear. There’s a lot we don’t know right now,” Heather Lowe, interim director of Dallas Public Library, told the *Observer*. “Digitizing those items not only protects the original items, it also creates much more access and awareness for this really important story that is integral to the story of Dallas.”

The library’s Craft collection **comprises four parts memorializing the leader** who, in 1944, became the first Black woman to vote in a Dallas County public election. The collection includes personal items such as photographs, notes, scrapbooks and campaign materials; lectures, essays and articles detailing the civil rights and NAACP era in Dallas specific to Craft; correspondence and briefing materials from Craft’s time on the Dallas City Council; and papers pertaining to the Craft estate.

Lowe estimated that around a third of the digitization had been completed before the funding was frozen.

While the city memo adds that library leaders are still waiting to see the full impact of Trump’s executive order on Dallas’ library system, Lowe worries that **further impediments to funding could keep the library** from starting services or projects in the future. Local taxes make up the majority of a public library’s budget. Still, funding issued by a group like the IMLS or the Texas State Library can help fund specialized projects, historic preservation efforts or support staff positions.

The GED testing center at the J. Erik Jonsson Central Library, the homeless engagement initiative that offers resources to unhoused Dallasites who visit the library, English language learning classes and the instrument lending program were all projects born out of Texas State Library and Archives Commission grants.

It is “very unlikely,” Lowe said, that those projects would have been able to get off the ground without the initial seed grant funding given to the library system. Moreover, the state commission also subsidizes the Dallas Public Library’s online databases of academic journals and legal information.

Lowe warned that funding, too, is now in question, which could force the library to reallocate budget funds to the resources or reduce the offerings completely.

“The state library also supports the interlibrary loan program and things like talking books and braille libraries,” Lowe said. “So there’s a lot that the state library does that isn’t immediately being impacted, but we may feel the pinch of it a year or two down the road.”

Though there’s never a good time for a library system to get hit with funding woes, now is especially inopportune for the Dallas Public Library. **Last April, the Dallas City Council adopted** a 20-year library facility plan that calls for expanding or replacing 12 library branches across the city. While \$41 million was earmarked in the 2024 bond for updates or overhauls at three library branches, funding for the other nine branches needs to be sourced “creatively,” Lowe said at the time of the plan’s adoption.

Now, chaos in D.C. is resulting in the upheaval of the funding the library thought it could count on.

“We're an extremely efficient municipal government department with pretty slim margins,” Lowe said. “So any challenge to our funding does require us to think harder about the services that we provide and try and pivot to address changes.”

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EMMA RUBY is a staff writer at the *Dallas Observer* where she covers local news. Before joining the *Observer* in April 2024, Emma was the editor of the *Oak Cliff Advocate*. She was the news editor of Loyola University's student newspaper, *The Maroon*, and interned with the *Dallas Morning News* and WVUE-TV in New Orleans while in college. Emma also worked as a media coordinator for Tulane University Athletics, and interviewed Coach K after Duke's 2022 Final Four loss.

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