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Public libraries in Georgia brace for federal cuts

[Molly Samuel](#) | WABE

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Public libraries in Georgia rely on local, state and federal money. Cuts to the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services could impact statewide library programs. (Matthew Pearson/WABE)

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the Institute of Museum and Library Services in March.

The loss of funding from the federal agency would affect programs that serve public libraries across Georgia, including the statewide summer reading program; the GALILEO system that provides online access to journals, books and other publications; the PINES network that gives library users access to material at other Georgia library systems; and the Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled.

“No matter where you live in Georgia, the IMLS grants impact your library service, but especially in the rural and underserved parts of the state,” said Alan Harkness, library director of Chattahoochee Valley Libraries in and around Columbus, Georgia.

Congress created the Institute of Museum and Library Services in 1996. A large amount of its budget goes to grants it distributes to states to spend on public libraries.

In this state, that money – a little over \$5 million in 2024 – goes to the Georgia Public Library Service, which is a division of the Board of Regents. The state agency does not have all that money in hand at this point; the program works by distributing reimbursements.

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Harkness, who has also worked in Gwinnett and other Georgia library systems, as well as the Georgia Public Library Service, said public libraries in Georgia get local and state support. But without the federal money, there would be a scramble, and it could cost jobs.

"It's just a lot of uncertainty," he said "When you start talking about statewide services like GALILEO or PINES, that's not something we can be uncertain about. We need to be able to plan for that."

Trump moved to make cuts to the IMLS in mid-March in an executive order that also identified several other agencies deemed unnecessary by the president.

Since the IMLS was created by Congress, the president can't completely shut the agency down on his own; Trump's order specified it was eliminating "non-statutory components and functions" of the agencies.

The president named U.S. Deputy Secretary of Labor Keith Sonderling the acting secretary of IMLS. According to NPR, the IMLS staff was put on administrative leave.

Emails to IMLS from WABE bounced or went without response.

"A dismantling of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) would have negative implications for every American and the library services they rely upon," the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies wrote in a statement in response to the executive order. "It will be difficult for our nation's state libraries to successfully advance their missions should Federal funding be eliminated."

A group of states – Georgia not included – filed a lawsuit in early April trying to keep the White House from dismantling the agency.



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