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21 States Sue Trump Over Attacks on Museums and Libraries

Trump's move to dismantle the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which was established by Congress, is "illegal several times over," says a new lawsuit.



Maya Pontone 23 hours ago



A sign protesting culture and academic funding cuts at an anti-Trump march in Manhattan on April 5 (photo Valentina Di Liscia/*Hyperallergic*)

A coalition of attorneys general from 21 states have filed a lawsuit against President Donald Trump and several senior administration officials to prevent the widescale razing of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and two other federal agencies.

The April 4 suit takes aim at Trump's executive order issued last month to effectively dismantle the IMLS and six other agencies by gutting all their “non-statutory functions and components.” Decried by national cultural organizations like the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the American Library Association (ALA), the directive has already led to a sweeping overhaul of federal workers and terminated grants to arts and cultural organizations.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, who is co-leading the case with attorneys general from Rhode Island and Hawaii, described Trump's order as “another attack on vulnerable communities, small businesses, and our children's education.”

In addition to the IMLS, the suit also seeks to stop the destruction of two other federal agencies that support historically underserved communities: the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), which provides peaceful conflict resolution services in labor disputes.

The suit argues that the president cannot override the congressional mandates that created these federal agencies, allocate their funds, and outline how they function, characterizing the Trump administration's dismantlement of these agencies as “illegal several times over” and citing the constitution's clear separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches.

“If the President disagrees with Congress's decision to support the Nation's libraries and museums, and enable the peaceful mediation of labor disputes, he is free to seek legislation abolishing the agencies that perform these — and many other — vital functions,” the suit reads.

Alongside the president, the suit also names Deputy Secretary of Labor Keith E. Sonderling, who was appointed acting director of IMLS in late March, and Russell T. Vought, the draftsman of Project 2025 who is currently serving as director of the Office of Management and Budget, as defendants, among other high-ranking Trump officials.

In the meantime, museums and libraries across the country are scrambling to deal with significant budget cuts as a result of halted or terminated IMLS funding, compounded by axed grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Drew Oberjuerge, the executive director of the Riverside Art Museum (RAM) in California, told *Hyperallergic* that the institution is currently planning for “best, moderate, and worst-case [funding] scenarios,” depending on the outcome of their pending grant requests at the IMLS and California Humanities, an NEH-funded partner organization.

“We are analyzing on how to best leverage our existing resources,” Oberjuerge said, adding that the institution is considering “all revenue angles” to avoid cutting programs, such as fall exhibition programming at the RAM's Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture.

Oberjuerge said that the museum has an IMLS grant request currently under review that would go to support this work.

“The IMLS has provided knowledge and support to help our organization be a stronger, more impactful one that better serves our diverse community,” Oberjuerge said.