

“This is actually unlawful, and we protest this in the strongest terms,” she said. “These are sophisticated organizations that closely budget to provide excellent, highly excellent services that have very high approval ratings throughout the nation. You know, there’s no reason to defund them.”

Attorneys general from 21 states filed a class action lawsuit on April 4 against the Trump administration in an attempt to stop the elimination of the agency after receiving letters that their federal funding was cut effective April 2. Iowa is not involved in the lawsuit.

Since the executive order, the entire agency staff of 70 employees has since been placed on administrative leave, according to NPR.

Helmick said that without federal employees to process funding, Iowa will not be receiving grant money regardless.

“By all intents and purposes, we are on a pause or in a holding pattern in the state of Iowa, because it takes human capital to process those congressionally required funds,” Helmick said.

Without this funding, the following programs at the Iowa City Public Library are at risk:

Summer Library Program, in which the State Library of Iowa provides public libraries with a comprehensive summer reading program through iREAD

All Iowa Reads, a program with the purpose of encouraging communities to come together to read and talk about a single book throughout one calendar year

People’s Law Library of Iowa, a plain language legal resource used by Iowans in an attempt to understand state laws

The State Library Endorsement, a program dedicated to training and supporting library staff in order to optimize service throughout the state, is also at risk. The endorsement also provides public libraries and library boards with necessary guidelines used to create staff policies.

The IA Shares program would also not survive without federal funding, a loss that would be felt at the state and local level. The statewide delivery service for public libraries allows people to access materials from libraries across the state, regardless of the available collections at their local libraries.

“Libraries aggregate those [federal] funds in a way that allows more than just an individual who happens to be wealthy to have access to these resources, and so [dismantling IMLS] is taking away from people’s access to that information,” Jennings said.

Helmick said that the Iowa City Public Library will have decisions to make surrounding the IA Shares program if it loses federal dollars.

RELATED: Potential changes to the Department of Education and federal student aid raise concern among the UI student body

Helmick said that the library will have to turn to postage to administer interlibrary loans, which would not be possible with the current volume of distribution. Helmick added that it will affect ICPL directly, because they produce a large number of interlibrary loans to rural communities throughout the state.

Helmick said while libraries are used to working with a shoestring budget, it would not be possible to maintain the same level of operation without funding from the federal government. Helmick mentioned it is Iowa City Public Library’s focus to absorb as many costs as possible in order to avoid impacting patrons, but that potential tariffs will increase the cost of books and make the margins razor thin.

“At some point, this is going to have to start affecting the public, even though that’s the last thing library workers want,” Helmick said.

Helmick emphasized that while all public libraries will feel the effects of the lost funding, rural libraries will be hit the hardest, and the Iowa City Public Library is “lucky” in comparison. According to the State Library of Iowa, 75 percent of public libraries throughout the state are in communities of 2,499 or less.

Roche expressed the same feelings about the impact the decision will have on rural communities.

“This kind of having the rug pulled out from underneath you in the middle of a grant process when funds have already been expended is extremely dangerous to these organizations,” she said. “I think we can expect small and rural libraries to close as a result of this.”

Helmick and Roche both said that while the executive order is distressing, it is not the first time the government, state or federal, has attempted to reduce funding for public libraries in recent years.

“There is a systemic effort to destroy the funding of libraries in the state of Iowa,” Helmick said.

House File 718, passed by the Iowa legislature in 2023, eliminated 97 library levies across the state in an overhaul of the property tax system. This reduced the funds available to many local public libraries.

Since then, other bills that threaten library funding have been introduced, but not passed.

“We’re talking about decades of consistent funding for beloved public institutions that they’ve come to rely on, to build it into their budgets,” Roche said. “They’ve improved services as a result of it, and now with no notice, without any feedback or care to understand the impact. It’s gone. It’s not how we are, that’s not how we do things in our business.”

Helmick said the move from the federal government could go hand-in-hand with potential book bans and limiting access to information.

“It’s a bit of trying to control the narrative and stymieing people from pursuing thought and information freely and independently,” Helmick said.