



Home > News > Libraries

21 States Sue Trump Administration Over Scuttling of IMLS, Other Agencies

By John Maher | Apr 07, 2025

Attorneys general from 21 states have sued the Trump administration to block its recent efforts to scuttle the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and six other federal agencies.

Filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island on April 4, the suit seeks an emergency temporary restraining order that would invalidate the March 14 executive order signed by President Donald Trump that calls for the elimination of the agency “to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law” and restore full agency functions. Among the plaintiffs are attorneys general from four states Trump won in the 2024 election: Arizona, Michigan, Nevada, and Wisconsin.

“Whatever the President’s policy preferences, he cannot override the congressional enactments that authorize federal agencies, appropriate funds for them to administer, and define how they must operate,” plaintiffs argue in their filing, noting that the closures violate the Administrative Procedure Act. “If permitted to stand, the shredding of these statutorily mandated agencies will inflict immediate and irreparable harms on the Plaintiff States, their residents, and the public at large.”

The filing continues: “The sudden halting of the agencies’ work after decades of close cooperation will immediately put at risk hundreds of millions of dollars in grant funding on which the States depend, and undermine library programs, economic opportunity, and the free flow of commerce throughout the country. The Administration cannot dismantle federal agencies in this way. The Closure Order and the actions that Defendants have taken to implement it are illegal several times over.”

The lawsuit follows weeks of turmoil at the IMLS, which is responsible for distributing federal funding to libraries, that began with the March 14 executive order. Since it was issued, the Trump administration installed a new acting director of the IMLS, who has worked alongside the advisory body called the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to put institute staff on administrative leave against the wishes of its advisory board and rescind grant funding from libraries nationwide.

To date, the filing notes, the IMLS has placed “85% of its staff on administrative leave.” That number is lower than previous reports, all unconfirmed by a mostly non-communicative IMLS and DOGE, had indicated. However, in a letter sent last week to the IMLS’s new acting director, Keith Sonderling—the second such missive since Sonderling was sworn in mid-March—the National Museum and Library Services Board, which serves as an IMLS advisory body, indicated that some reports suggested that “a small number of staff” may have been recalled since the leave was initially implemented.

The filing challenges not just the legality of the administration’s actions, but also its constitutionality. “If the President disagrees with Congress’s decision to support the Nation’s libraries and museums... he is free to seek legislation abolishing the agencies that perform these—and many other—vital functions,” the plaintiffs wrote. “One option that our Constitution does not give the President is to shutter the agencies himself, in defiance of the administrative procedures that Congress required to be followed, the appropriations that Congress ordered to be spent, and the separation of powers that every officer of our government has sworn to uphold.”

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