


Eliminating federal funds for libraries would harm local support systems

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR Carrie Willson, Executive Director, Calvert Library KennethWayne Thompson, Executive Director, Charles County Public Library Michael Blackwell, Director, St. Mary's County Library

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As the directors of Southern Maryland's three public libraries, we see each day how the library enriches the lives of community members by connecting them with information, resources and experiences. Yet darker days may be on the horizon.

The proposed elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, or IMLS, would dismantle the only federal agency that ensures each state library has funding to support their communities.

Libraries of all types nationwide receive just 0.003% of the federal budget through IMLS funds. In the 2024 budget, that amounted to \$3.3 million for the whole state of Maryland. While that is a tiny fraction of overall federal investment, it has an outsized impact on our communities.

In Southern Maryland, federal funding has helped equip bookmobiles with new materials and Wi-Fi. It provided assistive technology like workstations, special keyboards and screen reader software to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It promoted literacy for children in family childcare through storytime kits that correlated with a 9-percent increase in Kindergarten readiness. It supported cutting-edge virtual training for in-demand skilled trades. It also fostered library strategic plans and facilities master plans to most efficiently meet community needs.

Over the past four years, federal funding has sustained 30 library projects and 100 public programs across Southern Maryland, purchased more than 11,000 library materials and directly impacted more than 23,000 residents.

IMLS funding makes a real difference in our community every day. Taking that away would mean that either state and local governments would have to bear the burden, or services our residents rely on would disappear.

We have asked our federal representatives not to let that happen. Concerned residents may also consider joining the Citizens for Maryland Libraries to share their enthusiasm for libraries with other likeminded library supporters.

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