

SHOWCASE

BY ERICA THOMPSON,
STAFF REPORTER
ethompson@suntimes.com
@Miss_EThompson

Illinois officials and cultural institutions are fighting back against President Donald Trump's efforts to cut federal funding for libraries and museums.

Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul and 20 attorneys general have filed a lawsuit challenging Trump's March 14 executive order that called for dismantling the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Established by Congress in 1996, the agency allocated \$266.7 million in 2024 to support libraries, museums and archives, about \$11.3 million of that designated for Illinois, though some organizations say they're still waiting to receive their 2024 grants. Nearly all of the federal agency's staff has been placed on administrative leave.

"The Institute of Museum and Library Services helps to ensure that art, culture, history and literacy are accessible for all," Raoul said. "Attempting to dismantle agencies created by Congress is a continuation of this administration's unconstitutional and unlawful overreach."

The lawsuit also challenges the Trump administration's dismantling of the Minority Business Development Agency and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

Illinois organizations — including the Illinois Library Association, Illinois Association of Museums, and Museums in the Park — also support preserving the institute. They say its elimination threatens valuable cultural and educational programming and also access to books and the internet. They say they are especially concerned about smaller museums and libraries, including those in rural and other underserved areas, saying those would suffer most from the cuts.

The American Library Association, which is based in Chicago, disputes Trump's categorization of the federal agency as wasteful.

Rural libraries at risk

In 2024, Illinois received \$5.7 million from the institute's Grants to States program, which distributed \$180 million to state library administrative agencies.

The Illinois State Library al-

located \$2.5 million to the Illinois Heartland Library System and Reaching Across Library Systems, as well as \$1.8 million for support with cataloging, interlibrary loan and other services through the OCLC nonprofit, formerly the Online Computer Library Center. The rest of the funding went to a variety of other training, operational and programming initiatives, including the purchase of library materials and services for the Illinois Department of Corrections.

An additional institute library services grant of nearly \$2.4

supported a variety of programming, training, research, literacy services and technology initiatives at academic institutions, individual libraries and library consortia.

The institute said Illinois could expect to receive the same \$5.7 million grant for 2025, according to the state library.

Illinois Secretary of State and State Librarian Alexi Giannoulias said the dismantling of the institute would be "devastating."

"This is not just the dismantling of an agency," he said. "It's a downright assault on our core values as

a democracy that is going to have long-lasting consequences for every community in America. Eliminating the IMLS is going to negatively impact literacy education and equal access to knowledge."

While public libraries are predominantly funded by property taxes, advocates say the loss of institute funding will have a noticeable impact, especially on Illinois' interlibrary delivery system — one of the largest in the country. Last fiscal year, about 11 million items were shared among 1,700 public, school, academic and special

DuPage Children's Museum President and CEO Andrea J. Ingram says the Institute of Museum and Library Services had allocated an \$84,000 grant to support the museum's exhibit "The Questioners."

ZUBAER KHAN/SUN-TIMES

libraries in Illinois.

Based in Braidwood, Fossil Ridge is just one building, but it serves several villages and communities in Will, Kankakee and Grundy Counties. The library depends on RAILS support to help circulate well over a half-million items annually among a consortium of 130 libraries. It also provides a home-delivery service, which is valuable for homeschool parents, as well as people with disabilities and health issues.

"We could not service our areas without RAILS fully being funded," said Fossil Ridge Executive Director Rene Leyva. "We make deliveries five days a week. We want to continue that, but we are prepared to make cuts so that we can still continue offering the services, but that means that we also have to think about the state of the building, technologies and



THEY AREN'T GOING QUIETLY

Illinois library, museum supporters fight Trump funding cuts