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National IMLS Funding Cuts Have Impacts on Island Libraries

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An [executive order](#) issued by the federal administration on March 14th calls for deep cuts to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). IMLS is an independent federal agency that supports libraries and museums in all 50 states and U.S. territories through grantmaking, research, and policy development. It is the nation's only federal agency that funds America's libraries.

Though the bulk of funding for the San Juan Island, Orcas Island, and Lopez Island Libraries comes from the voter-approved property tax levies, the libraries do benefit from IMLS funding and will see some disruption of services if the budget is cut. The Washington State Library (WSL) published a document on March 18th that outlines how these cuts will affect Washington libraries. The current federal award of \$3.9 million for the Grants to States program, if cut, will have the following impacts across Washington:

- Access to eBooks and eAudiobooks will be reduced. WSL oversees the Washington Digital Library Consortium, which manages and helps fund the Washington Anytime Library, serving 40 Washington library districts, including our island libraries. The popular Libby app will have fewer titles and longer hold lines on available books. Worst-case scenarios include losing the Libby service for our patrons.
- Loss of research databases and training. Federal funds cover half the cost of statewide database licenses and extensive training made available for library staff. The island libraries would have

- fewer databases available for public use, and staff would lose valuable skills training.
- WSL supports technology upgrades for small and rural libraries like ours in Washington State. Lack of IMLS funding may mean our libraries have slower Internet access and pay for more expensive technology services.
 - End of Innovative Projects: Statewide programs like virtual reality headsets, tabletop gaming grants, State Discover Passes, and assistive devices for those with disabilities would disappear. The island libraries frequently utilize these grants to bring extra services to island residents, and our community would lose access to these innovative services.

It is important to note that IMLS funding supports many essential types of libraries across the state. Cuts to IMLS funding would seriously endanger prison, hospital, and tribal libraries and severely weaken the breadth of service offered by the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library.

[As stated by the American Library Association \(ALA\)](#), “As seedbeds of literacy and innovation, our nation’s 125,000 public, school, academic and special libraries deserve more, not less support. Libraries of all types translate 0.003% of the federal budget into programs and services used in more than 1.2 billion yearly in-person patron visits, and many more virtual visits.”

Those wishing to voice concerns over the federal administration’s executive order against IMLS funding can find suggestions at the [EveryLibrary Institute](#), a non-profit corporation that supports library funding across the United States. Our island libraries thank the community for its continual support, and we will continue to work to provide quality services and resources to the community.

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