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U.S. Representative Rick Larsen Visits San Juan Island Library

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U.S. Representative Rick Larsen visited the library on April 14th to speak with Library Director Laurie Orton, trustees, and other library staff about the effects of an [executive order](#) issued by the federal administration on March 14th, which 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. The Washington State Library (WSL) oversees the distribution of these funds to Washington libraries. The newly appointed acting director of IMLS has gone so far as to cancel all existing grants for three states—California, Connecticut, and Washington.

Representative Larsen and Director Orton spoke about several of the concerns for San Juan Island Library due to this cut to federal funding, including:

- 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.
- WSL supports technology upgrades for small and rural libraries like ours in Washington State. Lack of IMLS funding may mean our library has slower Internet access and pays for more expensive technology services. A current project installing better fiber to the library has stopped midway to completion as those promised funds are now frozen.
- Loss of research databases and staff training resources. Federal funds cover half the cost of statewide database licenses and extensive training made available for library staff. SJI Library will have fewer databases available for public use, and staff will lose valuable skills training.
- Statewide programs like virtual reality headsets, tabletop gaming grants, State Discover Passes, and STEAM kits for children's summer reading learning programs will or have already been canceled. SJI Library frequently utilized these grants to bring extra services to island residents, and our community would lose access to these innovative services.
- Services provided by the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library (WTBBL), a program of the Washington State Library and a division of the Office of the Secretary of State, may become virtually non-existent. WTBBL provides library services state-wide, at the library and by mail, to any Washington resident unable to read print material due to blindness, visual impairment, deafblindness, physical disability (cannot hold a book or turn pages), or reading disability.

Representative Larsen expressed concern for this loss of funding and will use this information to inform his work in the U.S. Congress. "Libraries are more than just stacks of books. For every \$1 that museums, libraries, and other nonprofit cultural organizations like San Juan Island Library receive in government funding, they return more than \$5 in tax revenue," said Representative Larsen. "Today, rural libraries like

the one I went to growing up may be the only source of free internet in a community. This administration says they are going after "waste, fraud, and abuse" in government spending — but they are actually attacking services that kids and families rely on.” Representative Larsen also donated a box of youth-age books from the Library of Congress to the library. These will be added to our collections or given away as prizes during our summer reading program.

Library staff can answer any questions you have at 360.378.2798 or sjlib@sjlib.org. Library programs and cards are free of charge to San Juan Island residents. In addition to its collections of books, videos, equipment, games, audiobooks, and other materials to loan, the library also provides public access computers, WiFi, and a suite of databases that patrons can access in the library or at home. Library hours are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 10 am to 6 pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays 10 am to 8 pm, Saturdays 10 am to 5 pm, and Sundays 12 pm to 3 pm.

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Representative Larsen tours the library with the Library Director and two members of the Library Board of Trustees.