



*Here's what's happening with*

*our right to read:*

*Chapter 23 April 23, 2026*

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[MO Right to Read – Supporting Missouri's Libraries](#)

## Half of State Funding for Libraries Likely to be Cut

As the Missouri Legislature moves towards the May 8 deadline of approving the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, it is likely that state funding for Missouri's libraries will be reduced by more than 50 percent.



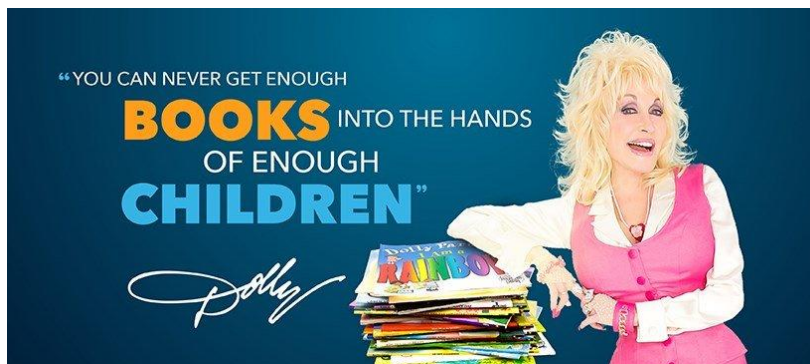
As of April 23, proposed funding for libraries was \$1.65 million, a steep cut from the recommended \$4.5 million. In Fiscal Year 2025-26, Missouri libraries will receive \$3.3 million. This funding is used to purchase books, audio and

video resources, magazines and other materials; it is critical to libraries' ability to provide current materials to the public.

State funding for Missouri’s libraries is generated by the Athletes & Entertainers tax collected from nonresident professional athletes and entertainers. **Under Missouri law, A & E funds are designated for distribution to arts organizations and libraries throughout the state.**

## **Dolly Parton’s Library Program for MO Children Faces a Two-Thirds Funding Cut**

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library — which sends free books monthly to children under age 5 — is facing a major state funding cut. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requested \$6 million for the program; Gov. Mike Kehoe recommended cutting it to \$2 million.



The program is administered by school districts as local partners, with no cost to schools for books or postage. **In 2025, 168,188**

**children were enrolled; cost per child is about \$26 annually.**

As of April 23, the Missouri Legislature had not approved the final budget for Fiscal Year 2027. If funding is reduced by \$4 million, it will “have a dramatic effect on the continued viability” of the program, according to DESE. The Dollywood Foundation is working with DESE to explore ways to minimize the impact and adapt the program.

*Sources: Springfield Business Journal; DESE*

## Voters Approve Positive Changes to Francis Howell School Board

Voters in the Francis Howell School District in St. Charles County [elected three new school board members](#) on April 7. They will replace incumbents who ran as a conservative slate. In recent years, the district experienced significant book challenges.



Brandon Rottinghaus, a political science professor at the University of Houston, said **St. Louis is seeing the effects of a national cooling-off period.** "Voters are prioritizing stability and day-to-day school operations over the ideological battles that emerged post-pandemic," he said.

## Settlement Protects Federal Funding for Libraries

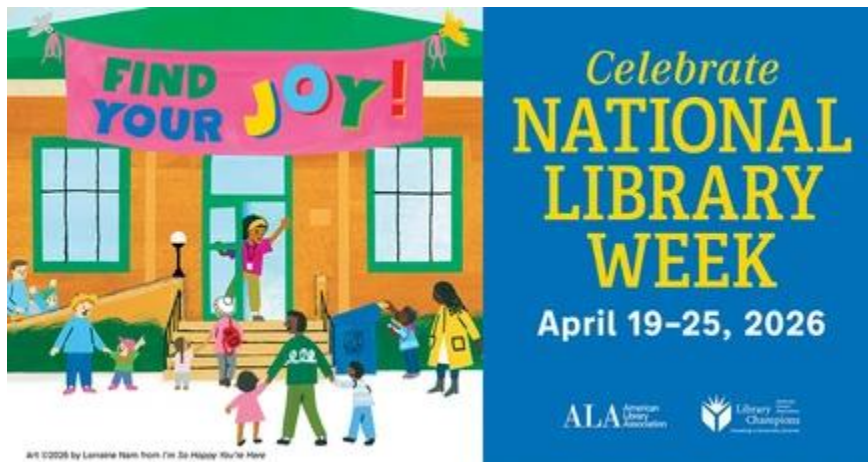
The American Library Association has reached a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice that [protects the Institute of Museum and Library Services \(IMLS\)](#) and ensures the agency will continue carrying out its congressionally mandated work. IMLS is the only federal agency dedicated to providing funding for the nation's libraries.



The agreement resolves litigation challenging the Trump-Vance administration's attempt to dismantle IMLS through executive action. **Under the settlement, the agency will continue awarding grants,**

**conducting research, and operating programs that support libraries and museums across the country.** The agreement also confirms that previously terminated grants have been reinstated, agency staff reductions have been reversed, and the administration will not take further steps to implement the executive order targeting IMLS.

## Fascinating Facts About Libraries



There are **more than 17,000 public libraries** in the US-- *including branches* -- more than the number of McDonald's restaurants in the country.

Libraries in the United States **circulate approximately 2 billion items** each year, including physical books, e-books, audiobooks, DVDs, and other materials.

Public libraries have adapted to a mobile, hyper-connected world by **becoming essential infrastructure** for communities. They provide access to technology, workforce development support, digital literacy training, and reliable information in an era saturated with noise and misinformation.

In many cities, libraries now function as **de facto community hubs and social safety nets**, particularly for people without consistent internet access, stable housing, or professional support networks.