

DECLARATION OF JOHN DICHTL

John Dichtl hereby declares, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1746, as follows:

1. I am the CEO and President of the American Association of State and Local History (“AASLH”). I first became a member of AASLH in 2002.

2. The American Association for State and Local History is a national membership association dedicated to helping the history community thrive. For the better part of a century, AASLH has provided leadership and resources to its members, who preserve and interpret state and local history to make the past more meaningful to all people. AASLH provides crucial resources, guidance, professional development, advocacy, new publications, field-wide research, and a sense of connectedness to over 5,200 institutional and individual members, as well as leadership for history and history organizations nationally. It is the only comprehensive national organization dedicated to state and local history.

3. I am familiar with the work of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (“IMLS”) because many of AASLH’s member-institutions receive funding from IMLS to service communities across the nation through a multitude of projects that seek to preserve and tell state and local history.

4. But these projects and institutions are at risk, because IMLS has begun rapidly cancelling dozens of grants through perfunctory letter notices informing grantees that their funding is being cancelled.

5. In addition, AASLH has likewise received IMLS grants and entered into at least one cooperative agreement in the past, and has recently been involved in discussions about potential new cooperative projects between AASLH and IMLS. However, those discussions have now stalled.

Direct grants to AASLH members and harm from funding cuts

6. Many of our AASLH members have shared with us that their grant funding from IMLS has been terminated. Already, I have received more than 30 examples of grant termination letters from member organizations. These letters are signed by IMLS Acting Director Keith Sonderling, and they are all nearly identical, with only the name of the recipient and the grant application number differing from letter to letter. The letters consist of a cover letter with the subject line “Authorization for Termination of Grant(s)” informing the recipient that “[t]his memorandum authorizes the termination of federal grants administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services”; and a “Notice of Grant Termination” saying “IMLS has determined that your grant is unfortunately no longer consistent with the agency’s priorities and no longer serves the interest of the United States.”

7. AASLH is conducting a Disruption Impact Survey to gauge the effect of recent executive actions, including the dismantling of IMLS, on AASLH’s member organizations and the broader history field. AASLH received over 240 responses to the survey detailing a variety of harms. Although AASLH is still reviewing the submissions, we have formally reviewed and identified 32 grant termination letters

issued by IMLS. 31 out of the 32 cancellation letters AASLH has reviewed as of the submission of this declaration were issued on April 8, 2025. The other letter was issued on April 1, 2025.

8. AASLH continues to receive a flood of termination letter examples from museum organizations every day, along with stories of the resulting harms to the grantee institutions. What follows is a small sample of the harms that those organizations have experienced so far.

9. A museum centering Native Alaskan culture is funded in significant part by several federal grants, including from IMLS. Each staff member works on grant-funded projects, so the entire team is affected immediately through grant cancellations, cessation of core projects, and the sudden need to find alternative funding to maintain staff. This also affects the museum long-term, with the likely termination of these programs that have supported library services, collections care, and public outreach.

10. An educational institution in Tennessee received an award from IMLS for nearly \$200,000 to process, preserve, and digitize the history of the people and cultures of southern and central Appalachia. Upon the termination of this grant, the center will need to end the project and eliminate the full-time position that was created and funded through the grant.

11. A museum in Illinois received a notice of cancellation of IMLS funding for a community-led project to integrate Latino history and culture into the

museum's exhibition in partnership with the two local organizations. This critical project cannot be completed without funding.

12. A preservation trust in Massachusetts received notice that a grant under the Save America's Treasures program for over \$200,000, awarded by the National Park Service in partnership with IMLS, would be cancelled. This funding was intended to pay for urgent repairs and restorations to a National Historic Landmark. The unexpected cancellation disrupted the preservation plans and left a major funding gap in a time-sensitive restoration effort. The potential to defer urgently needed repairs places the long-term sustainability of this treasured landmark at risk.

13. A historical society in Missouri received an award from IMLS to rehouse its catalogue and process new additions to the catalogue. As a small museum, the IMLS Inspire! grant was key to their ability to pursue this project. The grant allowed the society to hire two college students as part time interns and provide job training to support both as they pursue careers in the museum field. The termination of the award was devastating to the project: the society will be forced to let the students go because it cannot afford the stipend it planned to pay them, and on which the students were relying.

14. A Wyoming museum was likewise received an Inspire! Award that has been terminated by IMLS. The grant was intended to fund a project to scan and digitize their archives to preserve and protect their fragile collection for the future.

The benefits of this award would be shared with other small, rural Wyoming museums.

15. A museum in New York was granted an award for nearly \$200,000 from IMLS for programs about the history of enslavement in New York State, enabling new exhibits, staff training, external consultation, and more. The funding allowed the museum to provide visitors and community partners with promised research, programs, and exhibits, and to center Black voices. However, upon termination, only 6% of the grant had been reimbursed. As a result, the museum faces a significant funding shortfall.

16. An arts organization in California that serves people living in poverty and experiencing homelessness was able to pursue a project about healthcare and housing for the homeless community funded by an award from IMLS. The organization had received only partial payment for the work completed when it was terminated. The organization's upcoming connected project, also funded by an IMLS award, had only just begun when the IMLS termination letter was received.

Direct grants to AASLH and harm from funding cuts

17. AASLH has no current federal awards, so none were terminated. However, we had been in discussions with IMLS for two major projects we hoped to see into fruition.

18. Over the past year or more we had been talking with senior IMLS staff about a cooperative agreement for approximately \$1.5 million to support and

expand our Standards and Excellence Program (STEPS) for Museums. We had been told as recently as January that the cooperative agreement proposal was still being actively worked on and seemed hopeful to continue.

19. We had also hoped to move forward with our Equity and Culture at History Organizations (ECHO) survey project (now known as the National Survey of History Practitioners) with IMLS. In November, IMLS had told us they had “significant interest in incorporating this project into [their] IMLS Learning Agenda.”

20. We now expect the STEPS project will not be able to move forward given the dissolution of IMLS. Meanwhile, the ECHO project has been severely reduced in scope, staffing, and budget and will be completed in-house.

Other immediate harms

21. Some AASLH member-institutions were beneficiaries of the IMLS sponsored Museums for All program, which provides opportunities for low-income families to visit museums via free or greatly reduced admissions. Millions of visitors were able to visit museums through this program. Many AASLH member-institutions worry for the future of this important program and other key programming IMLS provides to support American museums.

22. Museums will suffer reputational and financial harms for ending projects prematurely. In many cases, organizations were in the process or had already raised required matching funds that may have been spent, restricted, or

need to be returned. Additionally, many grants are disbursed as reimbursements, so organizations have spent their own money upfront. Additionally, there are sunk costs and expended staff time on projects—many of which may have been revenue-generating—that are now canceled.

23. Museum staff, contractors, community partners, and museum goers will suffer from these sudden changes in institutional plans caused by these unexpected grant terminations.

24. The dissolution of IMLS will have profound impacts on AASLH and museums across the nation. These calamitous consequences will in turn impact our ability to serve our communities and tell our nation's story.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on April 17, 2025.

/s/ John R. Dichtl

John Dichtl