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May 1, 2025

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Acting Director Keith E. Sonderling
Institute of Museum and Library Services
955 L'Enfant Plaza SW #4000
Washington, DC 20024

Dear President Trump and Acting Director Sonderling:

I write to you with a deep sense of regret and dismay over the staff layoffs and the gutting of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), as well as the abrupt termination of two awarded federal grants to a well-renowned institution in my district, The Jack Hadley Black History Museum in Thomasville, Georgia.

The Museum was founded by Mr. James "Jack" Hadley, and it is currently located on the former campus of Douglass High School, a segregated school Mr. Hadley attended in the 1950s. After high school, Mr. Hadley joined the United States Air Force where he proudly served his country for 28 years, before returning to civilian life working as a City Letter Carrier. From a young age, Mr. Hadley made a hobby of collecting historic African American artifacts and memorabilia and teaching his family and others about the rich history they embodied. Upon his retirement, Mr. Hadley's vision for the Museum became a reality; he opened it in his hometown, established to educate the public about the broad range of history and culture of African Americans locally and nationally.

Specifically, two of the Museum's active grants created by Congress to support the expansion of public access to African American history were terminated mid-implementation. The grants were institution-specific, took years of planning and implementation, and focused on preserving and interpreting the precious oral histories that have been passed from generation to generation without being formally recorded. These are stories that may otherwise be lost or forgotten without well-equipped American cultural institutions like the Jack Hadley Black History Museum. The terminated grants are as follows:

Log Number: MH-256308-OMS-24

Supported the development of immersive audio guides and exhibits utilizing cutting-edge audiovisual technology to engage school groups and young visitors in the history of African Americans in Southwest Georgia. The project built on a prior IMLS-funded oral history initiative and included plans for professional presentations to the wider museum field.

Log Number: MH-253473-OMS-23

Funded an Oral History Project centered on the life of the founder, James "Jack" Hadley, and aimed to equip local educators with standards-based curriculum content. The grant supported transcribing, archiving, and interpreting oral histories, and included a strategy for developing a new exhibit about the museum's founding with the guidance of an exhibitions consultant.

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Throughout its history, the Jack Hadley Black History Museum has partnered in good faith with IMLS, followed the applicable laws and regulations, and worked hard to leverage hard-earned private funds with limited public dollars to support their institution and enrich the Southwest Georgia community, and the world, with our unique history – both the uplifting stories of American perseverance and triumph, as well as the dark chapters of the American story to include slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the horrors of lynchings and targeted violence against African Americans.

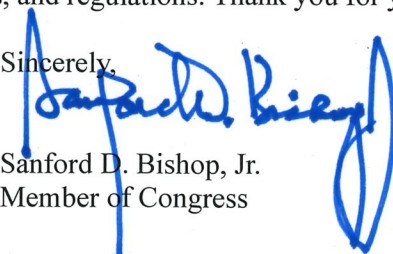
Remarkably, the Museum grants were terminated abruptly and without concern for the fact that the funds were obligated and already being utilized, required extensive planning and documentation by the Museum, and had demonstrated community support. As a result of these grant terminations, the Jack Hadley Black History Museum will be unable to expand its exhibits and programming in an innovative way that brings in more foot traffic, especially from school field trips and cross-country travelers seeking to learn more about Georgia's rich African American history. This loss is truly a great disappointment for the entire community in and surrounding Thomas County whose families, businesses, and institutions are deeply interconnected and dependent on one another.

Broadly, without IMLS grants, local museums across the country may lose the crucial support they need so that they can have the opportunity to innovate and find new and effective ways to attract visitors and gain regional attention without having to risk institutional funds needed to pay staff, cover the bills, and maintain a facility. The American people – especially those who live in rural, remote corners of the country – need and deserve meaningful institutions close to home from which to learn objectively about their culture, history, heritage, and a myriad of other crucial topics such as the arts, humanities, and sciences.

I fear that the Administration's actions to gut the IMLS will send to the American people the absurd and totally incorrect notion that libraries and museums are no longer needed and do not provide immeasurable value to our communities. To the contrary, tourism and exploration are on the rise following a few slow seasons during the COVID-19 pandemic. The American Alliance of Museums estimates that museums return more than \$5 in tax revenue for every \$1 they receive in public funding. Your Administration has the golden opportunity to restore the frozen IMLS funding to these crucial institutions so that millions of American families, small businesses, and local governments can reap the benefits.

IMLS is an essential institution of the Federal Government, and I ask that your Administration allow it to continue its vital function – to support the existence of thousands of American libraries and museums which help to officially bind and preserve our culture, boost local economies, and provide hands-on learning opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds. I specifically urge you to reinstate the Jack Hadley Black History Museum's previously awarded grants that were terminated mid-implementation in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress