

Congressional appropriations and authorization: Two sides of the same coin for IMLS

The fight for federal library dollars has occupied much of the library news from Washington since the administration proposed elimination of IMLS funding in March of this year. ALA has led the library community's efforts to ensure IMLS is fully funded. Though final decisions on appropriations have not been made, our advocacy has so far proven to be effective.

Both chambers of Congress rejected the president's request to eliminate funding for IMLS. The House-passed appropriations bill provided level funding for IMLS at \$231 million, while the Senate went even further by recommending a \$4 million increase for the library Grants to States Program, which is included under the LSTA portion of IMLS.

Congress was unable to pass a final budget by October 1 for the federal government and opted to approve a temporary "continuing resolution" to keep the government running at FY2017 levels through at least December 8.

Appropriations for IMLS is only one side of the equation. Equally important to funding IMLS or any federal program is its authorization. An authorization is, essentially, a law passed by Congress that says why a program should exist and what it should do. The authorization for most programs expires. Every time a program is up for renewal, Congress has the opportunity to reassess, change, or possibly eliminate a program. Is the program do-

ing what it was intended to do? Are there needed changes or modernizations? Is the funding level too high or too low? Should the program be sunset?

While an authorization typically approves a funding level for the program, an authorization is not necessary for a federal program to receive funding. Appropriators in Congress regularly approve funding for unauthorized programs. Having an authorization is a signal that a program has "friends" in Congress willing to fight to save the program. On the other hand, *not* having an authorization sends a subtle message that a program may no longer be useful or that its mission has not been reviewed in several years. In these times when some in Congress are hunting for programs to eliminate, *not* having an authorization is dangerous.

Fortunately, Senator Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island) is a champion of libraries and IMLS funding. Reed introduced an IMLS reauthorization bill last year—the Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA)—but passage stalled before the session of Congress expired. The Senator is back again this year with a new reauthorization that includes a few changes that would allow for more Native American tribes to participate in IMLS grant programs and allow grants for disaster preparation and response needs at libraries and museums.

At press time, Reed was working on the final details of the reauthorization and hoped to introduce the bill before the end of the year. ALA's Washington Office continues to work closely with Reed's office and other bipartisan supporters in the House and Senate to ensure reauthorization of MLSA. *RM*

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