

POLITICS

Feds freeze grant funding for some Oregon nonprofits ‘effective immediately’

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People arrive before the start of a naturalization ceremony at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Miami Field Office in Miami on Aug. 17, 2018. Authorities say lottery bids for highly-educated worker visas plunged nearly 40% this year, claiming success against people who were "gaming the system" by submitting multiple, sometimes dubious, applications to unfairly increase their chances. Wilfredo Lee | The Associated Press File



By [Yesenia Amaro](#) | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Some nonprofit legal service providers in Oregon expressed dismay Wednesday following new federal notices they received that immediately froze grant funding designed to help legal permanent residents become U.S. citizens.

The Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is among those that received the notice from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, dated Tuesday. The nonprofit was told that its grant from U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services was frozen "effective immediately."

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"We recognize this will have an impact on your organization," the letter reads. "We are unable to provide a timeline on this freeze."

The grant in question is worth \$300,000 over two years, said Frank So, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon.



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"It's really surprising," So said. "We didn't expect it at all."

It's unclear if this funding hold is distinct from the one the Trump administration announced last month, which was rescinded in the face of legal challenges and judicial intervention over what could have been trillions in federal funds nationwide.

The same day the Trump team relented, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem announced her department would freeze all grants to nonprofit organizations that do work tied to immigrant communities, so that each grant could be evaluated.

The letter Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon received cited Noem's decision. The Department of Homeland Security didn't immediately respond to a request seeking comment Wednesday.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon has received funding from the grant program since 2010, the executive director said. It has helped more than 4,000 permanent legal residents, also known as green-card holders, become U.S. citizens.

"We basically leverage this funding to fill and support various roles," So said.

The money supports two people on the organization's education team who perform community outreach to inform permanent legal residents that they can become U.S. citizens. It also helps waive fees associated with the application to become a U.S. citizen.

The Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, So said, also leverages the grant money to get matching funds from private entities or get them to make spaces available to hold citizenship workshops. In fact, the nonprofit has a workshop planned for March, and So said it will go on as scheduled.

"At the end of the day, this is going to hit our savings," he said, "And we really don't know how long we can continue to do this without funds that were appropriated and promised to organizations like us."

In 2024, U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services announced it would award up to \$10 million in competitive grants for organizations to "prepare immigrants for naturalization and promote civic integration through increased knowledge of English, U.S. history and civics," according to a webpage that has now been ["archived."](#)

Since fiscal year 2009, the program has assisted more than 350,000 immigrants to prepare to become U.S. citizens, according to the archived content.

In Oregon, there were an estimated 110,000 legal permanent residents in 2024, and about 80,000 were eligible to become U.S. citizens, according to [data](#) from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. A legal permanent resident, or green-card holder, must wait five years before applying for citizenship.

Frank Garcia, executive director for Immigration Counseling Service, said Wednesday his nonprofit also learned its grant funding is frozen. He declined to say how much the grant was worth but said it was supposed to run for four years to help provide legal services in rural areas.

The organization works to help people obtain documentation, work authorization, green cards and become naturalized citizens, he said.

"It's going to obviously stunt, delay, maybe not make those (services) available" to the community, he said of the funding freeze.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, criticized the Trump administration Wednesday for its decision.

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“Freezing funds already approved by Congress for local nonprofits working hard to help vulnerable Oregonians hurts families and weakens our communities,” he said in a statement, adding that he plans to press the administration to “restore these federal resources just as Congress intended.”

--Yesenia Amaro is an investigative reporter with a focus on social issues and communities of color. Do you have a news tip related to immigration, deportations or publicly funded programs designed to help immigrant Oregonians? Get in touch, 503-221-4395; yamaro@oregonian.com.

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