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Nonprofit Groups, State Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalitions Challenge Unlawful Conditions Imposed by HHS

Grant Restrictions Jeopardize Crucial Funding for Critical Services, Support and Healthcare

A lawsuit has been filed today by a coalition of organizations to challenge unlawful new grant restrictions from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that are forcing hundreds of nonprofit organizations, domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, and a county safety net hospital to choose between accepting unlawful conditions or forgoing grant funding that is needed to offer critical services, support, and healthcare for communities. Children, youth and families, survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and other vulnerable groups will be affected if these new grant conditions are allowed to remain in place.

The Trump-Vance administration is attempting to unlawfully impose grant restrictions on HHS grantees that will be immensely harmful to communities across the country. The grant restrictions prevent Plaintiffs from supporting transgender individuals, implementing diversity and inclusion practices that aim to address racial disparities, and using Housing First strategies that have been proven effective, among other policy directives drawn from a series of executive orders from the Trump-Vance administration. The restrictions would have far-reaching impacts due to the expansive mission of HHS, the largest grantmaking federal agency, which awards billions of dollars in grants each year — including more than $81 billion in discretionary awards alone in 2026.

The attempt to weaponize federal funding is nothing new for the Trump-Vance administration. Earlier this year, a federal court blocked similar unlawful conditions that HHS imposed on grants in a lawsuit also brought by a nationwide coalition of domestic violence, sexual assault, housing, youth and homelessness organizations. Though the unlawful imposition of ideological conditions on grants has already been stopped by courts, the administration is again attempting to force nonprofit groups to either fundamentally betray their missions, legal obligations, and clients or to lose vital funding entirely. Not to mention, the policy priorities that the groups are forced to align with are impossibly vague, inconsistent with federal and state laws, and expose nonprofit organizations everywhere to arbitrary and unpredictable enforcement.

The case is *RICCF v. Kennedy*, and the legal team at Democracy Forward working on the matter includes Aleshadaye Getachew, Anna Deffebach, Joel McElvain, and Robin Thurston. Plaintiffs are also represented by Amy Romero and Juan Bedoya, for the Lawyers' Committee for Rhode Island, and Lynette Labinger, cooperating counsel for the ACLU Foundation of Rhode Island.

"It is deeply regrettable that we must join this suit to protect the children and families our members serve," said **Tanja Kubas-Meyer, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families**. Our members provide critical social and health services to protect children, support youth and families, and help Rhode Islanders through their most difficult moments. Federal funding should support children and families' needs and not be conditioned on ideological restrictions that conflict with providers'

missions and obligations. We are taking this step because all children and families deserve access to the care, support, and resources they need to thrive."

Benedict F. Lessing, Jr., President/CEO, Community Care Alliance, said today, "The issue for Community Care Alliance is that no federal health and human service funding should be predicated on language that discriminates against anyone in need of services due to their race, gender identity or immigration status. We believe that this is not only unlawful, immoral but that it is cruel and contrary to HHS' mission over several decades. Owing to the needs of the vulnerable populations served by HHS funding, we hope the court sends a strong message that this type of discriminatory language cannot be used to shape the operations of human service providers." —Benedict F. Lessing, Jr., President/CEO, Community Care Alliance

"Survivors deserve access to safety and support without unnecessary barriers, yet, these harmful restrictions imposed by the Department of Health and Human Services threaten that fundamental principle. By targeting inclusive services, efforts to address racial disparities, and proven approaches to supporting survivors of abuse, these conditions would disproportionately harm Black and Brown communities, immigrants, undocumented individuals, LGBTQIA+ people, and other vulnerable communities who already face significant barriers to safety and support. They would force organizations to choose between critical federal funding and the integrity of the work we do. For survivors of domestic violence, that could mean fewer pathways to safe housing, essential services, and the support needed to rebuild their lives. We remain determined to protect the systems and resources survivors depend on and to ensure that all survivors are treated with dignity and respect," said the **Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence.**

"Once again, the federal government is attaching unlawful strings to federal funds," said **Amy Romero, Chief Legal Counsel of Lawyers' Committee for Rhode Island**. "Yet also once again, courageous nonprofits are challenging the unlawfulness of these conditions. LCRI is proud to represent Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, Community Care Alliance, and Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, as well as the many other plaintiffs from around the country, who refuse to betray their missions and their clients."

"This latest unlawful attempt to overhaul the grant funding requirements clearly undermines the important work of these organizations, including the three that provide fundamental services for Rhode Islanders who are struggling," said **Steven Brown, executive director of the ACLU of RI**. "These restrictions are incredibly broad and put grant applicants between a rock and a hard place: They can choose to apply and accept restrictions that are counter to their own missions or not apply, lose the grant funding, and be unable to support the people in their communities. We are hopeful the court will rule these restrictions are unlawful."

Quotes from other plaintiff organizations and co-counsel Democracy Forward can be found here.

The coalition of plaintiffs includes the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, Community Care Alliance, Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault, District of Columbia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Hawaii State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence, Violence Free Iowa, Jane Doe Inc., the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, Kansas Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence, North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Valorus, Vermont Network Against Domestic and

Sexual Violence, Violence Free Minnesota, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and Hennepin Healthcare System, Inc. The coalition is represented in the matter by Democracy Forward, the Lawyers' Committee for Rhode Island, and the ACLU Foundation of RI as cooperating counsel.

Read the complaint here.

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