

Community services grants on chopping block in D.C.

Program defenders up against Trump claims that grants fund ‘woke programs’

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STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

LAWRENCE >> Anti-poverty advocates and a Democratic congresswoman on Thursday accused the Trump administration of “doubling down” on spending cuts that could harm the state’s lowest-income residents.

As President Donald Trump targets the Community Services Block Grant program he alleges has been “hijacked” for other purposes, Bay Staters argued that the funding provides critical support for housing assistance, child care, heating aid and more.

Leaders from several community action agencies laid out a call to action, urging their supporters and constituents to contact members of Congress and express opposition to the cuts Trump has eyed.

“It’s not only a part of our identity, but it’s also an amazing investment in our communities,” Greater Lawrence Community Action Council Executive Director and CEO Vilma Dominguez-Martinez said about the block grant program. “Through community action, the entire community prospers each time a family avoids eviction with our support. We alleviate the strain on our hospitals and shelter system.”

Trump in May outlined a discretionary budget request for federal fiscal year 2026, which begins Oct. 1. His plan would cut money from what the administration described as several “woke programs,” including elimination of Community Services Block Grants worth a combined \$770 million.

The White House in a fact sheet alleged the funding “has been hijacked from true poverty reduction to things such as equity-building and green energy initiatives.”

“Grants have funded things such as the California Community Action Partnership to host focus groups on bringing ‘DEI to the forefront,’ and Community Action Agency in Wisconsin

to ‘combine clean energy with affordable housing in the pursuit of both economic and environmental justice,’” the White House wrote.

The grant program is a core source of funding for the 23 community action agencies in Massachusetts, who together serve more than 600,000 people, according to the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP).

Dominguez-Martinez said her organization used \$381,000 in CSBG funds to help more than 2,700 people last year with workforce development, English classes and financial empowerment services.

“This is pretty affordable, considering that at a cost of just \$72 per client — talk about cost-effective and rate of return,” Dominguez-Martinez said.

Massachusetts received \$75 million in CSBG funds last year, said Congresswoman Lori Trahan, who added that its uses ranged from job training to housing assistance to emergency food aid. Some of the grant funding went toward the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which helped more than 170,000 Bay State families pay for heat or electricity.

“Anyone who has spent a February here in Massachusetts knows just how critical that is and how dangerous it would be to take it away, but that’s what Republican politicians in Washington are trying to do,” Trahan, a Democrat, said. “They’re defunding these programs, and it’s not just cruel, it’s short-sighted, because when families can’t afford their heat or their food or stable housing, the ripple effects hit our schools. It hits our hospitals, our local economies, our entire community.”

Trahan described the budget proposal targeting CSBG as “doubling down” on the major spending cuts already enacted through the federal reconciliation bill targeting areas such as Medicaid and food stamps.

“Eliminating LIHEAP and CSBG would be devastating for families, seniors, and veterans across Greater Lowell and throughout the country,” Community Teamwork Inc. CEO Carl Howell said in a statement. “These aren’t handouts—they are lifelines. They keep people safe in their homes, provide critical stability during times of crisis, and ensure no child or elder is forced to choose between heating their home and putting food on the table. We are profoundly grateful to Congresswoman Trahan for her leadership in protecting these essential programs and standing up for the communities that rely on them most.”

MASSCAP launched an email campaign helping supporters contact Congress to urge continued funding for the block grant program.

“Community Action was created over 60 years ago to fight poverty, to eliminate the paradox of poverty amidst plenty in the richest country in the world,” said MASSCAP Executive Director Joe Diamond. “We’ve made progress. There have been fits and starts, and now

we're facing probably the most stressful, if not dangerous, time in the life of the republic in terms of our ability to organize ourselves and help each other."

MASSCAP and community action agencies are asking the public to visit masscap.org/takeaction and urge their congressional representatives and senators to fight to protect these programs, include CSBG and LIHEAP funding in the fiscal 2026 budget, and save Community Action.