

Nationwide Coalition Files Lawsuit Challenging Blocked Funding for Domestic and Sexual Assault Organizations

The National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) filed a lawsuit (*Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence v. Bondi*) on behalf of 17 state domestic violence and sexual assault organizations, seeking immediate relief to stop the Trump-Vance administration from imposing unlawful restrictions on grants issued by the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women (OVW).

The new restrictions imposed on grant funding for domestic and sexual violence services make it impossible for many of the service providers to operate programs effectively, threatening to eliminate services that victims of violence rely on in neighborhoods throughout the country.

“The president lied in his promise to protect women, and is now threatening to block funding for our clients who actually protect women every day—so we are taking this administration to court,” said Gaylynn Burroughs, vice president of education and workplace justice at NWLC, one of five organizations representing the plaintiff coalition.

“Our clients offer safety and support for survivors, with services like case management, counseling, housing assistance, legal help, medical

care, and more. Holding back their funding in the name of a racist, xenophobic, transphobic agenda is unacceptable, and we will fight for our clients to secure the funding they deserve, that keeps women, their families, and our communities safe.”

The Trump administration is demanding that, in order to receive funding, organizations must certify they won’t engage in “out-of-scope” activities, including programs centered on “gender ideology” or “illegal DEI” activities that “do not advance the policy of equal dignity and respect” or promote “the violation of federal immigration law.” The administration is also zeroing in on activities that “frame domestic violence or sexual assault as systemic social justice issues rather than criminal offenses.”

These certifications defy the very purpose and promise of VAWA, which was originally passed by Congress in 1994 to address gender-based violence. The act is reauthorized every 10 years with new and improved programs that respond to the systems that perpetuate violence against women.

In addition to NWLC, Democracy Forward, Jacobson Lawyers Group, Lynette Labinger for the ACLU of

Rhode Island, and DeLuca, Weizenbaum, and Barry & Revens, Ltd. for the Lawyers’ Committee for Rhode Island are representing the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. The group of state domestic violence and sexual assault coalition includes: the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault, DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin: the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence, Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Jane Doe Inc. (The Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence), Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence, Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, ValorUS, Violence Free Minnesota, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

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