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LOCAL NEWS

DOJ cancels \$2 million in grants to UTEC mid-cycle, nonprofit says

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Former U.S. Assistant Attorney General Amy Solomon spoke at UTEC Sept. 28, 2023 as Biden's Department of Justice announced nearly \$5 million in grants awarded to violence-prevention organizations across Massachusetts. Trump's DOJ informed UTEC this week it was canceling \$2 million in grant funding to the nonprofit. (Peter Currier/Lowell Sun)

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LOWELL — Amid the Trump administration's attempts to drastically cut government spending, a local nonprofit was informed by the Department of Justice this week it would be losing \$2 million in grant funding in the middle of the grants' cycles.

UTEC, a Lowell-based nonprofit aimed at community violence prevention and intervention, announced Wednesday the DOJ is cutting nearly \$2 million in Community Violence Intervention Grants previously awarded to the organization.

In a statement from UTEC, the nonprofit said they were informed by the DOJ Tuesday of the termination of two grant contracts awarded in 2021 and 2023 for community violence intervention services. With the additional loss of DOJ awards to law enforcement and other nonprofits to which UTEC was a subgrantee, the nonprofit is losing \$2 million in federal funding.

“The Department of Justice’s decision to immediately cancel hundreds of grants, including critical funding for gun violence prevention and community-based intervention programs, is deeply disappointing,” said UTEC CEO Gregg Croteau in a statement Wednesday. “This negatively impacts our communities in a time where we are working so intentionally to combat the harms that affect our young people. These cuts directly affect communities like ours across the country that are working to prevent violence and who are working to support young people most at risk.”

Croteau said the programs UTEC had funded by these grants are “highly effective.”

“We know that these programs are highly effective because we do this work everyday—in partnership with a variety of other community based organizations, law enforcement and correctional facilities. We know the impact of this sustained investment in community-based approaches to gun violence protection,” said Croteau. “Cutting off funding to programs like these, midway through grant cycles, with no warning, undermines trust, stability, and progress. We must continue to support the community-rooted solutions that have been proven effective. Today, we call on federal leaders to act and ensure that funding decisions reflect the urgent need of our communities.”

The DOJ letter said the grant funding “no longer effectuates the program goals or agency priorities” as the reasoning for termination, Croteau said in a phone call Wednesday.

The DOJ did not return a request for comment from The Sun Wednesday afternoon.

Croteau said they received the news from the DOJ at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, and that UTEC still needs to take some time to assess the practical impacts of losing this funding.

“Obviously we are committed to making sure we are still standing alongside our young adults and doing the work,” said Croteau.

The issue is not about UTEC, nor is it unique to the Lowell nonprofit, Croteau said, with hundreds of organizations across the country getting the same news Tuesday.

“This is not about UTEC, we are just one of many that are getting cut. This is about the entire field, and our commitment to public safety and young adults,” said Croteau.

DOJ officials came to UTEC's Lowell headquarters under the Biden administration in 2023 to announce the second award of Community Violence Intervention Grants, along with four other Massachusetts organizations which received a total of \$5 million. Those were Roca Inc., Suffolk University, the Boston Public Health Commission and Health Resources in Action Inc.

When UTEC received that award, Croteau said the funding would be used to support the organization's street and prison outreach programs, as well as supporting young adult educational employment programming.

The funding was given through reimbursements for related expenses by UTEC. With the cancelation, Croteau said some expenses made since the beginning of April are likely to go without reimbursement from the grants. UTEC is likely to appeal the cancelation of the grant, Croteau said, and they have been in communication with other similar organizations in and outside of Massachusetts since they got the news.