

DOJ Stops Federal Legal Aid to Immigrants

Published Jan 23, 2025 at 5:34 PM EST

Updated Jan 23, 2025 at 6:58 PM EST

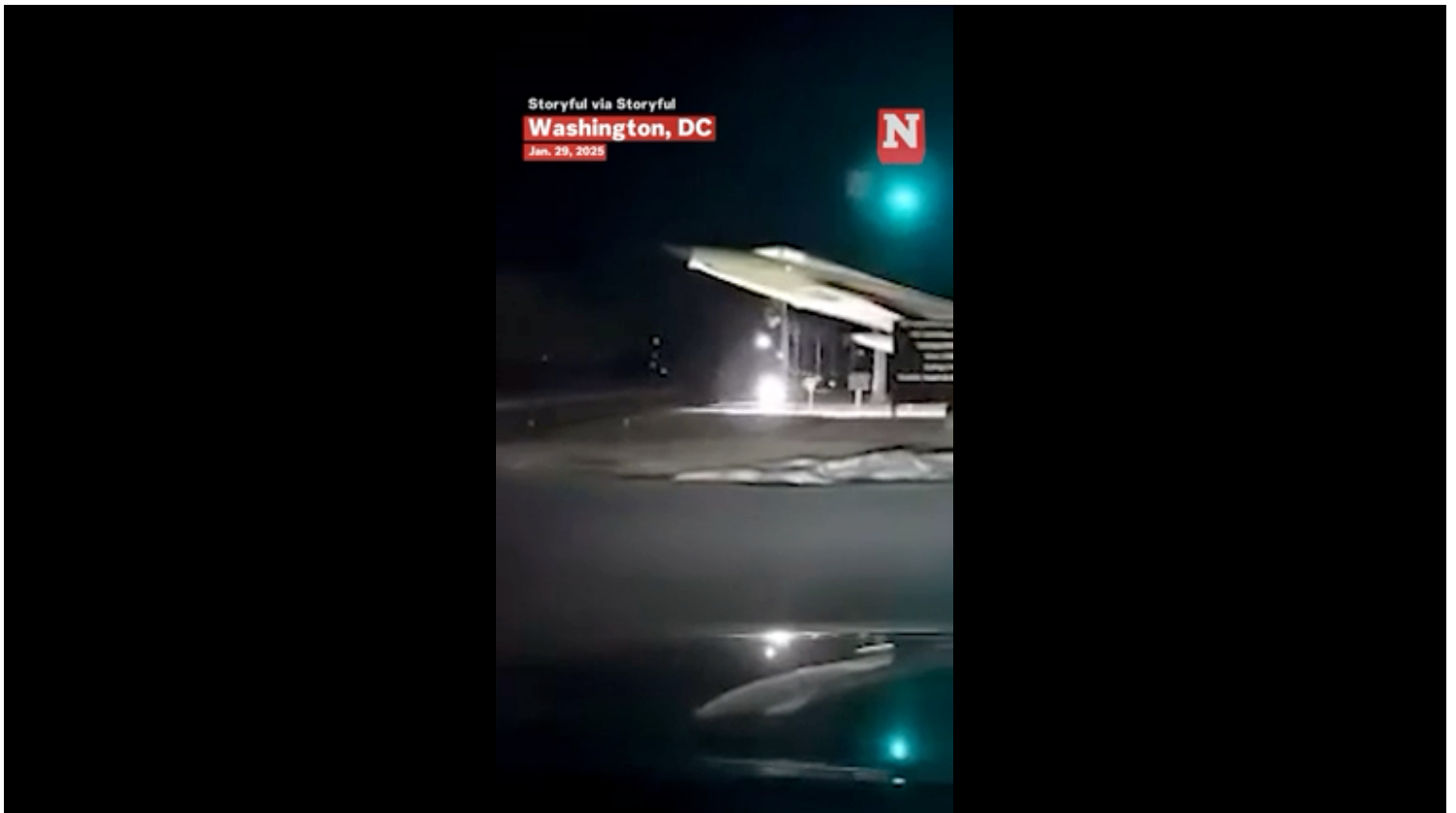
"Free" shouldn't cost \$14.99

Switch to TurboTax and do your taxes yourself in the app by 2/18 - Free, no matter your situation.

All forms	\$0	\$0
Federal returns	\$0	\$0
State returns	\$0	\$ 14.99
Total to file	FREE in the app	\$14.99

Excludes TurboTax Live

[Learn more](#)



By [Dan Gooding](#)
Politics Reporter

[FOLLOW](#)

14

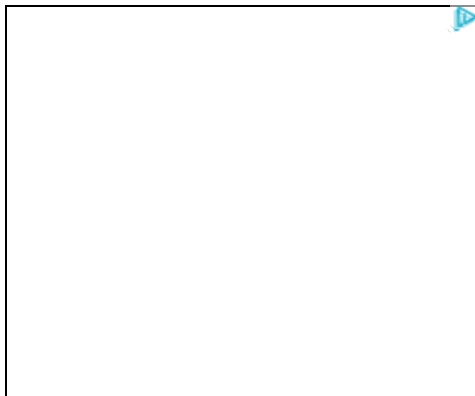


The [United States Department of Justice](#) has reportedly told organizations that receive federal funding to provide legal services to immigrants to stop work immediately.

One such group, which offers multiple programs including support for [unaccompanied children](#), said it received a "stop work order" from the DOJ on Wednesday, two days after President [Donald Trump](#) returned to the White House.

"If these programs are being stopped, it just means that people who have bonified, real claims for protection could be sent back to danger because they don't even understand what they are asking for in front of an immigration judge," Greg Chen, senior director of government relations with the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), told *Newsweek*.

Newsweek reached out to the DOJ via email for comment.



Why It Matters

The move appeared to be [one of several made by the new administration](#) to enact tough-on-immigration policies promised by the new president. Many undocumented migrants require court hearings to have their cases determined, but the system can be complicated and confusing, especially for those with little money or who speak little English.



Mexican migrants Laura Elizabeth and her son Matias turn themselves in to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol after crossing into the U.S. on January 5, 2025. Inset: The U.S. Department of Justice logo. **BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES/AP PHOTO/EVAN VUCCI, FILE**

What To Know

Federal programs to support non-detained migrants in understanding what to expect during their court proceedings have existed since at least 2003, when the Legal Orientation Program began. This was followed by the Immigration Court Helpdesk in 2016, designed to help migrants navigate the paperwork needed and find counsel where possible.

According to [ABC](#) News, which obtained the internal memo from the DOJ, providers of these services were told to stop work immediately, at a time when over 3.5 million cases are sitting in the department's backlog.

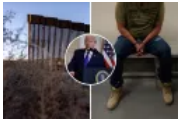


Chen told *Newsweek* that he understood private immigration attorneys were among those sent the order, potentially

affecting those in detention facilities waiting to have their cases heard.

READ MORE

Immigration



These Are the Immigration Bills Congress Has Introduced So Far

School Parent Detained in Washington ICE Raid

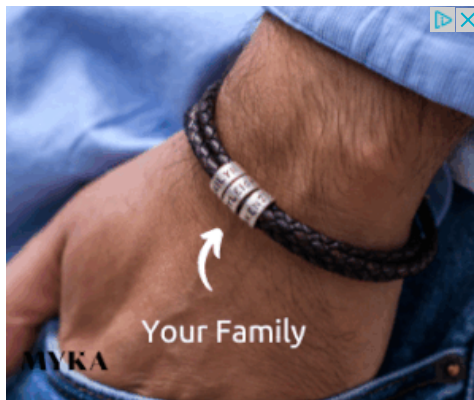
Will Trump's Executive Order Require Americans to Carry ID or Face Arrest?

How Many Migrants Have Been Arrested or Deported in Trump's First Week?

Reacting to the news, the Acacia Center for Justice said it has been forced to suspend four programs: the Counsel for Children Initiative, the Legal Orientation Program, the Immigration Court Helpdesk, and the Family Group Legal Orientation Program.

"Acacia's legal access programs support a fair and orderly immigration system by helping children, families, and individuals better understand their rights and obligations while they are in immigration proceedings, a fact that has ensured bipartisan Congressional support for the continuity of these vital programs throughout [Republican](#) and Democratic administrations," Shaina Aber, executive director of the Acacia Center for Justice, said in a press release.

"We provide them with basic yet fundamental information, such as when and where to show up for court. The programs help immigrants and our nation's immigration courts by ensuring participants understand the court's orders, know what documentation to provide, and what to expect throughout the process in their native language."



Similar helpdesk programs are still listed in 22 immigration court locations on the DOJ's website. Chen said that [Congress](#) had appropriated funds to implement these programs, which the Executive branch was obligated to honor.

Aber argued that the U.S. Constitution was clear that all people have the right to due process, regardless of where they are from. That also includes children, who often have to face immigration judges alone, as they cannot afford or get access to adequate legal aid.

Under one of the president's [executive orders](#) issued Monday, entitled "Protecting the American People Against

⇒ **Newsweek**

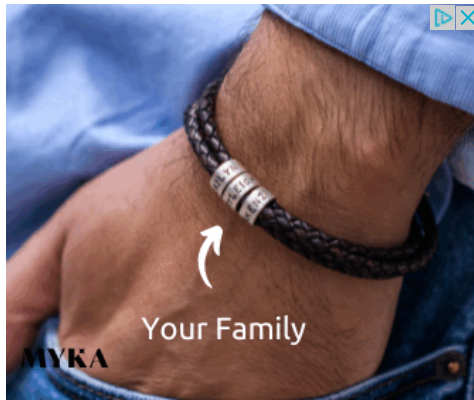
SUBSCRIBE FOR \$1

Login



organizations "supporting or providing services, either directly or indirectly, to removable or illegal aliens."

The order asked that funds should be paused while the audits took place.



The DOJ order comes after it began instructing federal prosecutors to target state and local officials who try to stand in the way of expanded immigration enforcement, in particular targeting illegal immigrants who could be deported.

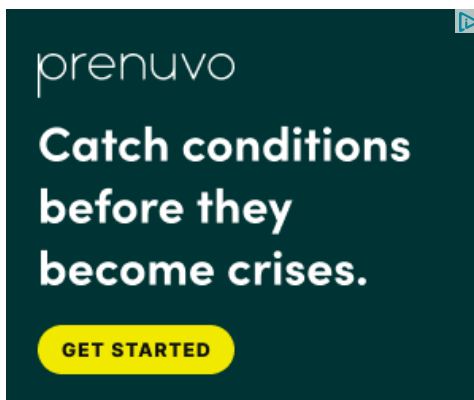
What People Are Saying

Greg Chen, senior director of government relations with the American Immigration Lawyers Association, told *Newsweek*: "My concern is if they pause it for an extended period of time, let's say several months, then the nonprofit organizations or the legal service providers aren't going to get paid. They're going to lose staff, lose capacity. It's like not watering your lawn in the middle of summer for two months and expecting to come right back and your lawn to be green again. The lawn will die."

Aber, in the Acacia Center for Justice press release: "The suspension of these longstanding programs could leave hundreds of thousands of vulnerable immigrants—including children and families—without access to basic legal information and representation. This decision undermines due process and puts lives at risk, disproportionately harming those already facing tremendous hardship."

What Happens Next

The executive order includes a provision to "claw back" funds from organizations if the programs they provided thanks to federal funds were found to be unlawful or sources of waste, fraud, or abuse.



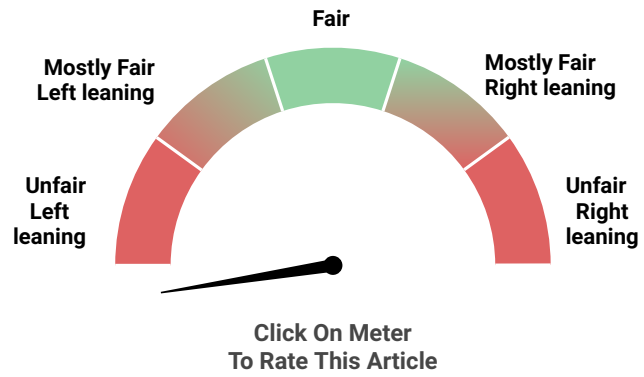
Groups like Acacia have vowed to continue to fight for immigrants' rights and challenge the Trump administration's actions to limit them.



Fairness Meter

Newsweek Is Committed To Journalism That's Factual And Fair.

Hold Us Accountable And Submit Your Rating Of This Article On The Meter. 



[Request Reprint & Licensing](#)

[Submit Correction](#)

[View Editorial & AI Guidelines](#)