

# Portland nonprofit helping immigrants gain legal status sees funding freeze

A new federal grant funding freeze impacts two Oregon nonprofits helping immigrants gain legal status.

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PORTLAND, Ore. — U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden is speaking out about a new wave of funding freezes impacting nonprofit groups in Oregon. The sudden freeze in federal grant money involves groups that help immigrants attain legal status.

In a statement to KGW, Sen. Wyden addressed ongoing freezes in funding, "They're stunts that sometimes break contracts and end up costing taxpayers more while harming our community."

Frank Garcia, the executive director of Immigration Counseling Services in Portland, said the email they received Tuesday from the federal government was short and to the point, saying in part, "...your grant from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is frozen."

It went on to say, "We are unable to provide a timeline on this freeze."

Garcia said he can't understand how any program that builds toward the dream of U.S citizenship would be cut by the federal government.

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"You move from a less dependent state to an independent state — and someone who becomes a real contributor and helps our local economy and the family, prosper," he said.

Garcia, a former farmworker and son of migrant parents, said he has worked his way up to a community leader by creating or taking part in programs to improve the overall community. He said dealing with recent freezes in funding for a program that serves rural communities around the state has been chaotic.

"It's really hard to plan and develop a strategy in regard to our work when one day you have funds, and the next day you don't," Garcia said.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon also depends on grant money from USCIS, but it, too, received notice Tuesday that its 15-year grant funding under the New Americans Initiative is frozen. He said everyone benefits from helping immigrants attain legal status.

"I don't know what this administration is hoping to do, but this should be a bipartisan effort," said Frank So, the organization's executive director. "This should be something that reflects the values of our country. We don't help people because they're Americans; we help people because we are Americans, and that is something that we need to remember."