News

U.S. Vice President-elect J.D. Vance, former U.S. senator from Ohio, and U.S. President-elect D

U.S. Vice President-elect J.D. Vance, former U.S. senator from Ohio, and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump greet Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York after he delivered the invocation during inauguration ceremonies in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jan. 20, 2025. Trump takes office for his second term as the 47th president of the United States. (OSV News photo/Chip Somodevilla, pool via Reuters)

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Catholic bishops sued the Trump administration on Tuesday over its abrupt halt to funding of refugee resettlement, calling the action unlawful and harmful to newly arrived refugees and to the nation's largest private resettlement program.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops says the administration, by withholding millions even for reimbursements of costs incurred before the sudden cut-off of funding, violates various laws as well as the constitutional provision giving the power of the purse to Congress, which already approved the funding.

The conference's Migration and Refugee Services has sent layoff notices to 50 workers, more than half its staff, with additional cuts expected in local Catholic Charities offices that partner with the national office, the lawsuit said.

"The Catholic Church always works to uphold the common good of all and promote the dignity of the human person, especially the most vulnerable among us," said Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the USCCB. "That includes the unborn, the poor, the stranger, the elderly and infirm, and migrants." The funding suspension prevents the church from doing so, he said.

"The conference suddenly finds itself unable to sustain its work to care for the thousands of refugees who were welcomed into our country and assigned to the care of the USCCB by the government after being granted legal status," Broglio said.

The conference is trying to keep the program going, but it's "financially unsustainable," he said, adding that it's trying to hold the U.S. government to its "moral and legal commitments."

The conference is one of 10 national agencies, most of them faith-based, that serve refugees and that have been sent scrambling since receiving a Jan. 24 State Department letter informing them of an immediate suspension of funding pending a review of foreign-aid programs.

Read full document:
Document
Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief (Feb. 18, 2025).pdf

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, notes that the resettlement program isn't even foreign aid. It's a domestic program to help newly arrived refugees — who arrive legally after being vetted overseas — meet initial needs such as housing and job placement.

"USCCB spends more on refugee resettlement each year than it receives in funding from the federal government, but it cannot sustain its programs without the millions in federal funding that provide the foundation of this private-public partnership," the lawsuit says.

The lawsuit said the government is attempting to "pull the rug out" from under the program, causing it longstanding damage.

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The lawsuit names the departments of State and Health and Human Services as well as their respective secretaries, Marco Rubio and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Both departments have roles in delegating resettlement work to the bishops conference.

There was no immediate reply in court from those departments. An HHS spokesperson said the department does not comment on pending litigation.

The USCCB said it is still awaiting about $13 million in reimbursements for expenses prior to Jan. 24.

As of Jan. 25, it said, there were 6,758 refugees assigned by the government to USCCB's care that had been in the country less than 90 days, the period of time for which they're eligible for resettlement aid.

The conference said suspending the resettlement effort will only prolong the time it takes for refugees to find employment and become self-sufficient.

President Donald Trump, whose first administration sharply cut refugee admissions, immediately suspended the decades-old program upon taking office again in January. He and his proxies have criticized refugee resettlement and other avenues of immigration.

Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, recently accused the bishops conference for resettling "illegal immigrants" in order to get millions in federal funding — an apparent reference to the resettlement program, which involves legally approved refugees. The lawsuit noted that federal reimbursements don't cover the entire cost of the program and that in 2023 the conference paid $4 million more than it received, while additional donors supported resettlement efforts by local Catholic Charities and other recipients.

Vance's criticisms drew rejoinders not only from U.S. bishops but an implicit rebuke from Pope Francis, who said Christian charity requires helping those in need, not just those in one's closest circles.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.