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City of Columbus Joins Lawsuit Challenging Trump Administration's Federal Funding Freeze Set to Impact Local Projects

City's grant to replant tree cover in disadvantaged neighborhoods is among those targeted for cancelation despite project being already underway

COLUMBUS, OH— Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein today announced that the City filed suit in federal court challenging the Trump administration's freeze on federal funding for critical community-based programs, including a U.S. Forestry Grant administered through the City's Recreation and Parks Department that works to replenish tree canopy in certain disadvantaged areas. The DOGE-targeted program has worked to plant more than 1,200 trees over the past year, which have largely been in historically Black neighborhoods.

"Healthy neighborhoods start from the ground up. Studies show that there is a correlation between low-income areas and low tree canopies. We will continue to make expanding our tree canopy a cornerstone of our environmental policies, not only to reduce energy usage, but to make healthier, equitable environments for residents in all of our neighborhoods," said Columbus Mayor Andrew J. Ginther.

In recent years, Columbus has worked to improve air quality and improve property values by implementing a tree-planting initiative. As a part of this tree canopy renewal, the City's Recreation and Parks Department successfully applied for an Urban Forestry Grant as a subgrantee of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

The City received a \$500,000 grant in order to "further expand its tree canopy through the purchase and plantings of approximately 1,250 diverse, large-class street trees in disadvantaged areas," and during the 2024 planting season, Columbus expended \$393,930 for tree planting, and subsequently requested reimbursement for those expenses, which is supposed to be paid out through the grant funding.

However, the DOGE targeting of the program threatens the entirety of the grant amount, including \$393,930 the City would be on the hook for if the Trump administration skips out on the bill or significantly delays repayment. If that happens, the City would be forced to cover this expense through money from its Capital budget.

“The chaos in Washington caused by the Trump administration is killing jobs, threatening local investments, and stalling community-based projects, many of which already have shovels in the ground. This extreme approach isn’t efficient or even effective. Rather, it’s simply undermining programs and harming the communities that stand to benefit from them, which in this instance is a historically Black Columbus neighborhood,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein.

“In Columbus, neighborhoods targeted for tree planting were data driven - the areas selected lacked trees compared to other parts of town. Yet DOGE algorithms seem to have haphazardly targeted this important initiative that will lead to better health outcomes, air quality and home values for our residents simply because it was a historically Black neighborhood.”

Columbus joined various cities and non-profits to file the lawsuit, including the Southern Environmental Law Center, the Public Rights Project, and the cities of Baltimore, MD, and New Haven, CT.