

A look at the various lawsuits faith groups have filed against the Trump administration

by [Jack Jenkins](#)

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People protest near the White House, January 28, against a funding freeze of federal grants and loans after a push from President Donald Trump to pause federal funding. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis)

President Donald Trump remains locked in at least five major lawsuits filed by religious groups during the first two months of his new administration, showing tensions between the White House and the faith-based organizations challenging his agenda.

The latest chapter in the ongoing legal battles unfolded on Monday, when a legal [report](#) announced the federal government had paid Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Worth more than \$47 million for refugee resettlement work—funds frozen since Trump halted the federal refugee program in January.

The case highlights a sustained faith-based pushback to Trump's actions that began almost immediately after he took office. His efforts to reshape the federal government and dramatically alter immigration policy have been met with religious resistance almost every step of the way—including in the courts.

The payment in Texas was part of a broader outcry against Trump's decision to effectively freeze the refugee program and, in turn, abruptly halt funds—including for [work done before Trump became president](#)—for the groups that partner with the government to resettle refugees once they've arrived in the United States.

[According to the Dallas Morning News](#), the millions paid to Fort Worth's Catholic Charities agency, which has overseen Texas' refugee resettlement services since Gov. Greg Abbott [pulled the state from the federal program](#) in 2016, was part of a [suit filed in early March](#) against the US Department of Health and Human Services, which supplies some funds related to refugee resettlement.

In the lawsuit, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Worth demanded it be paid millions in withheld funds it typically distributes to various partner organizations in the state, alleging Trump's funding freeze was unlawful and led to widespread layoffs.

The Texas result follows another legal victory for faith groups involved in a similar case, [Pacito v. Trump](#), filed by national faith-based refugee resettlement agencies Church World Service and HIAS, alongside Lutheran Community Services Northwest and individual refugees and their families, against the Trump administration for suspending the refugee program. In late February, US District Judge Jamal Whitehead, the federal judge overseeing the case in Seattle, [blocked](#) the president's executive order halting the suspension of the refugee program.

However, the day after the ruling, the government [sent out "termination orders" regarding federal contracts](#), also known as cooperative agreements, to all 10 refugee resettlement groups working with the government. The administration then argued in court that the organizations, seven of which are faith-based, no longer had standing to sue. The move resulted in a [tense court hearing](#) March 4, in which

Whitehead questioned the timing of the termination orders.

Resettlement groups also argued they had yet to see evidence of the refugee program restarting to comply with the judge's order, prompting Whitehead to order the government to produce a status report [released last week](#). In it, federal authorities acknowledged a "significant deterioration of functions" of the refugee program.

In that same March 4 hearing, lawyers for the government suggested the abrupt contract cancellations were part of ongoing litigation in yet another case, [US Conference of Catholic Bishops v. US Department of State](#), filed in Washington, DC. Unlike *Pacito v. Trump*, the suit filed by the USCCB—which also partners with the federal government to resettle refugees—was narrower in scope: The bishops focused primarily on the government's contracts with the USCCB in the US, alleging the government had violated the Administrative Procedure Act.

The USCCB's request for a preliminary injunction was denied by a judge in early March, who argued the case should be resolved by the Court of Federal Claims. In response, the USCCB asked the DC Circuit appeals court to issue an emergency injunction—the only feasible way to recoup the withheld funds within a relevant timeline. The USCCB, like other resettlement agencies, offers refugees 90 days of assistance upon arrival into the US, but the Trump administration froze the program on January 24, meaning the bishops have until April 23 to offer refugees still under their care any funds traditionally provided by the government.

The DC Circuit is expected to respond by the end of next week.

"The USCCB continues to advocate for refugees and we are doing what we can to ensure that the newly arrived refugees and their families, who were assigned to our care by the State Department, are not deprived of assistance promised to them by the United States," Chieko Noguchi, a USCCB spokesperson, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the federal government is also embroiled in two lawsuits centered on the Trump administration's decision to rescind a 2011 government rule that discouraged immigration raids at "sensitive locations," such as houses of worship.

Although the two cases differ slightly, they both allege the government's actions violated both their right to free association and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, arguing rescinding the rule reduced worship attendance and the use of services

provided by the religious communities. The federal policy change has already resulted in [at least one immigration arrest](#) at a church and diminished worship attendance among immigrants, including those with legal status and US citizens.

The first of the lawsuits, [*Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends v. US Department of Homeland Security*](#), was [initially filed](#) on January 27 by a slate of Quaker groups and later joined by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and a Sikh temple in Sacramento, California. They already won a narrow legal victory: In late February, the plaintiffs received a preliminary injunction restricting immigration raids at their houses of worship as the case proceeds, although it applies only to the groups involved with the case.

[The second lawsuit](#), filed on February 11, had a more expansive list of plaintiffs, with 27 religious groups, including entire denominations such as the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Union for Reform Judaism, and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, signing on. Those religious groups have also requested a preliminary injunction, but the case is ongoing.

Religious groups and faith leaders are also part of at least three other lawsuits against the Trump administration. HIAS—a Jewish organization that provides humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees—is among the plaintiffs in a [suit](#) focused on the administration's halt in global aid funding. The interfaith environmental justice organization Faith in Place recently joined a lawsuit regarding the [freezing of Inflation Reduction Act grant funds](#), and a Lutheran minister is part of a [filing](#) challenging the administration's decision to gut the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. —Religion News Service