



Envelopes for Catholic Relief Services' Rice Bowl program are displayed in this illustration file photo. CRS is the overseas relief and development agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S. (OSV News/Octavio Duran)



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Where are the Catholic Church's lawsuits?

The news that staff at Catholic Relief Services are preparing for [massive cuts](#) in their programming because of the Trump administration's efforts to shut down foreign aid is disturbing for what it says about the Trump administration. But, why has Catholic Relief Services not sued to stop the president's attempt to abrogate contracts?

President Trump signed an [executive order](#) Jan. 20, ordering a 90-day freeze on foreign aid while his administration examines the spending. The government already had contracts with groups like CRS and outstanding bills. Because CRS has been irreparably harmed by the stoppage, and will continue to be so harmed, the organization has standing to sue at least for a stay in the implementation of the president's order.

The American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees, two unions that represent workers at USAID, brought a suit against the effort to place those employees on administrative leave, and they [won](#). Judge Carl Nichols, whom Trump appointed to the bench in his first term, reinstated 500 workers who had already been placed on administrative leave and barred Trump's order from taking effect against 2,200 additional workers the unions represent. The order is temporary, but it affords the rest of us time to point out that the president does not have the authority to simply dismantle an agency established by Congress.

It didn't take the courts long to halt Trump's executive order ending what he calls "birthright citizenship" and what the rest of us know as the clear meaning of the 14th Amendment. U.S. District Judge John Coughenour, who was appointed by Ronald Reagan, [said](#) the order was "blatantly unconstitutional."

When President Trump's Office of Management and Budget issued a memo trying to freeze various spending programs on Jan. 27, the National Council of Nonprofits and other plaintiffs filed a motion seeking a temporary injunction. The OMB rescinded the [memo](#) on Jan. 29, but the White House said the memo was rescinded, not the freeze.



That left people scratching their heads. Judge Loren AliKhan of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia granted the motion for an [injunction](#) on Feb. 3, ordering the freeze lifted.

On Feb. 8, a federal judge in New York [blocked](#) Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency from accessing private data about U.S. citizens collected by the Treasury Department and to destroy any such data they already collected.

On Feb. 10, a judge in Massachusetts [blocked](#) the Trump administration's effort to stop the National Institutes of Health from paying administrative costs to universities that conducted research for the NIH. The decision only applies to the 22 states who sued, all of them represented by Democratic attorneys general, so if your child is in a clinical trial in a red state, you might be out of luck.

Do you see a pattern? Put simply, many [legal challenges](#) have stopped something unconstitutional Trump wanted to do while others have put his plans on pause. In no case has he won outright. But you only get relief if you are party to the legal challenges. So, I repeat the question: Where are the Catholic Church's lawyers?

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Philadelphia Archbishop Nelson Pérez is the chairman of the [board](#) at Catholic Relief Services and there are 12 other bishops on the board. The general secretary of the U.S. bishops' conference, Fr. Michael Fuller, serves as secretary of the CRS board. So, it is likely that the CRS board is coordinating with the leadership of the bishops' conference. The problem is that the phrase "leadership of the bishops' conference" is an oxymoron.

The conference issued an "[action alert](#)," encouraging Catholics to contact their lawmakers and express support for Catholic Relief Services. That's great. More needs to be done. The bishops' conference can send out its leaders to appear on morning television shows to defend our development work around the world. It can ask its members to aggressively contact other religious leaders who depend on USAID funds for their work overseas. Can someone call the Mormon senators from Utah? And, can we have a nationwide collection for Catholic Relief Services to make up some of the money it is losing?



It is remarkable that Vatican officials, such as Alistair Dutton, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis, have been more outspoken on the cuts to humanitarian aid than the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, Archbishop Timothy Broglio. Caritas called the aid cutoff "reckless" and Dutton [warned](#) that it could kill millions of people. Broglio has said nothing.

Emails and phone calls to CRS's press office were not returned. Chieko Noguchi\*, executive director for public affairs at the bishops' conference "respectfully declined to comment at this time."

If the U.S. bishops do not step up, and step soon, they will deserve the dread judgment pronounced in the Book of Daniel, Chapter 5, Verse 27: "You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting."

*\*This story has been updated to correct the spelling of Noguchi's first name.*

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)