

## Another judge blocks feds from ending teen pregnancy grant

May 30 2018, by Gene Johnson

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A federal judge in Seattle on Tuesday became the latest to block President Donald Trump's administration from prematurely cutting off funding for science-based programs aimed at reducing teen pregnancy.

King County, which includes Seattle, sued after the Department of Health and Human Services decided to end funding two years early for what was supposed to be a five-year, \$5 million grant through the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program.

The county was among 81 grant recipients notified last summer that their funding would end early. The news came after advocates of abstinence-only education were appointed to key positions at Health and Human Services, and the department offered shifting explanations about why it was ending the funding, the county said in its lawsuit.

U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour, an appointee of former President Ronald Reagan, on Tuesday blocked the administration from cutting King County's funding without cause, calling its actions arbitrary. Judges in Spokane, Washington; Baltimore; and Washington, D.C., have made similar rulings.

The department's "failure to articulate any explanation for its action, much less a reasoned one based on relevant factors, exemplifies arbitrary and capricious agency action meriting reversal," Coughenour wrote.

Health and Human Services did not immediately respond to an email

seeking comment. In court documents it argued that it had a right to change its funding priorities.

It also has issued statements suggesting that the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program was ineffective. Advocates of the program credit it with helping to lower the teen pregnancy rate 41 percent since 2010.

"We sued the federal government because they are attempting to eliminate funding for programs based on science and evidence in favor of right-wing ideology that is out of touch with reality," King County Executive Dow Constantine, a Democrat, said in a written statement.

Congress created the \$110 million Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program in 2010 as a way to support and develop evidence-based programs to reduce teen [pregnancy](#). In 2015, Health and Human Services awarded 81 grants that were supposed to last five years.

King County's grant was to expand its sex education curriculum—called High School Family Life and Sexual Health, or FLASH—to other jurisdictions around the country, where its effectiveness in persuading teens to delay sex, or to use birth control if they are sexually active, could be measured against that of standard curriculums. The [program](#) is already considered effective, officials say, and King County's [teen pregnancy](#) rate is well below the national average.

Before Health and Human Services announced it was pulling [funding](#), the department had given King County's study positive reviews, the lawsuit said.

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Citation: Another judge blocks feds from ending teen pregnancy grant (2018, May 30) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

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