

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 27, 2026

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Alex J. Adams
Assistant Secretary for Family Support
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Subject: End the Freeze on Basic Needs Funding

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Assistant Secretary Adams,

We write to express our outrage regarding the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) January 6 decision to unilaterally, illegally freeze over \$10 billion in funding for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) programs in California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, and New York—an action currently blocked by a temporary restraining order.¹ This action is on top of additional barriers that have been placed on child care funding nationwide. We urge you to immediately reverse this illegal action and release these funds.

Let's be very clear: This freeze has nothing to do with fraud or waste. This reckless decision will inflict irreparable harm on children, seniors, people with disabilities, and working families, all to satisfy President Trump's penchant to retaliate against certain states that do not bend the knee to his will. There is no acceptable fraud, nor should Congress or the Administration tolerate wasteful spending of taxpayer funding. But you have provided no evidence, or even specific examples, of situations you consider fraud in the five states. If you want to fight fraud, we urge you to reissue HHS's demand for repayment of TANF funds that individuals have pled guilty to misusing funds in Mississippi and ask President Trump to reinstate the highly-qualified, non-partisan inspector general.

You are acting in a manner that completely disregards the critical services these programs provide to millions of Americans. Federal regulations generally require that federal grantees draw down grant funds to accommodate immediate needs on an "as needed basis only", to be spent within three business days of receipt.² Therefore, broadly and without notice delaying the draw down of grant funds, as you attempted to do, has near immediate impacts and threatens to abruptly shut down the provision of a wide range of services—from supporting child care for working families, preventing child abuse and neglect to providing meals to seniors.

Your latest, unlawful seizure of Congressionally-mandated funds comes straight from a tired and cruel Republican playbook: first, target public programs that provide a lifeline to low- and middle-income people; second, smear the recipients of this aid by characterizing them as cheats and fraudsters; and third, use those fabricated or exaggerated claims as a pretext to slash funding. Your goal is not to improve program integrity; rather, it is to weaponize the federal government to harm your political foes and dismantle the social safety net. If President Trump were serious about fighting fraud, he would not have fired 17 independent inspectors

¹ <https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/court-filings/state-of-new-york-et-al-v-adminstration-for-children-and-families-et-al-temporary-restraining-order-2026.pdf>

² <https://pms.psc.gov/grant-recipients/funding-request-formula.html>

general in a single night as one of the first actions following his inauguration.³ Inspectors general are the primary defense against government waste, and they are legally mandated to be independent and non-partisan.

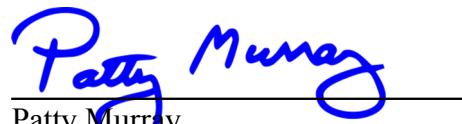
While you make unsubstantiated allegations of corruption, you are hurting working families who play by the rules. The people you are punishing are moms and families who need child care assistance so they can go to work. They are seniors who rely on Meals on Wheels and SSBG-funded transportation to stay independent in their homes. They are children living in poverty who depend on TANF for basic necessities, like shoes and school supplies. They are vulnerable children and seniors at risk of abuse and neglect; this essential funding ensures their safety. By cutting off this funding, you are pulling the rug out from under hard-working Americans struggling to make ends meet who are trying to provide for themselves and their families.

Do not pretend that starving children and seniors, forcing parents to choose between keeping their jobs and having a safe place to care for their children, and abandoning elders subjected to abuse and neglect is a form of fiscal responsibility. We will not stand by while this administration characterizes struggling families as fraudsters to justify its cruelty. We demand that you stop playing politics with people's lives and immediately restore TANF, CCDF, and SSBG funding to all states.

Sincerely,


Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on
Finance


Bernard Sanders
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions


Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on
Appropriations


Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related
Agencies

³ <https://americanoversight.org/investigation/trumps-illegal-firing-of-inspectors-general/>



The Honorable Richard E. Neal
Ranking Member, Committee on
Ways and Means



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee on
Education and Workforce



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee on
Appropriations