

Elon Musk threatens funding for central Ohio Lutheran homeless health center

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Alex Brandon
/
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Elon Musk speaks after President-elect Donald Trump spoke during an America First Policy Institute gala at his Mar-a-Lago estate, Thursday, Nov. 14, 2024, in Palm Beach, Fla.

Billionaire Elon Musk, the head of the Trump Administration's Department of Government Efficiency, threatened to withdraw funds from Lutheran charities around the country, including one in central Ohio.



Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio was called out by Musk in a social media post over the weekend by President Donald Trump's former advisor Michael Flynn. Musk responded to Flynn's post on X, that questioned why the organizations were getting so much in federal funds, saying the DOGE team is "rapidly shutting down these illegal payments."

The funds totaled about \$80 million across dozens of agencies nationwide.

The @DOGE team is rapidly shutting down these illegal payments
<https://t.co/GabhBL7gxf>

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) February 2, 2025

Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio runs several different programs benefitting domestic violence survivors, veterans and the homeless. The \$8 million of funding the Ohio agency received was to fund a federally-qualified health center for the homeless.

Flynn's original post included a spreadsheet of different LSS organizations around the country and how much grant funding each received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

LSS spokeswoman Jennifer Hamilton said the funding mostly came from grants given to them under President Trump's first administration. The funding has already been largely spent for their programs between 2017 and 2024.

"Charitable works are often undertaken by individuals all the time. And in America, we don't necessarily rely exclusively on the government to do those things," Hamilton said. "The government... relies on (nonprofits) to do the work. They can't for some of our most vulnerable populations."

Hamilton said of their roughly \$75 million a year budget, \$16 million comes from the federal government.

"That's nothing to sniff at," Hamilton said.

Hamilton also sent a statement from LSS President and CEO Rachel Lustig, who said they've gotten no notice from the federal government that any funding was paused.

"We at Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio have a long-standing relationship with the government and meet rigorous financial requirements, including an annual independent audit. The grants specifically mentioned are for the LSS Health Center, which provides health care to people experiencing homelessness," Lustig said.

"We are disappointed unfounded accusations of money laundering can circulate so broadly, but we will stay focused on providing people in need with housing, health care and emergency assistance with dignity and respect," Lustig said.

Musk's threats to remove federal funding allocated to nonprofits like LSS comes as Trump attempted and then backtracked from freezing much of the federal government's funds. DOGE recently gained access to the U.S. Treasury's sensitive payments system.

Through this system, DOGE could have wide leeway to access important taxpayer data, among other things.

U.S. Rep. Joyce Beatty said in a statement that Lutheran Social Services and many other faith-based nonprofits have touched the hearts and lives of so many central Ohioans through their services. She criticized Trump and Musk for threatening their funding.

"Thoughtless and unconstitutional attempts to freeze federal funding from President Trump, coupled with reckless rhetoric from his boss Billionaire Musk, threaten the hard work of these organizations and their positive impact on the Columbus community," Beatty said. "It's disturbing that one, unelected billionaire is systematically trying to run critical government functions and our democracy into the ground and the President of the United States is either in full agreement or failing to pay attention."

Senator Bernie Moreno, HHS, the U.S. Treasury Department and DOGE did not respond to a request for comment.

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