

Thanks for trying out Immersive Reader. Share your feedback with us.



Trump Administration To Planned Parenthood: Return Coronavirus Relief Funds





The Trump administration is asking local Planned Parenthood affiliates around the U.S. to [return millions of dollars](#) in loans received through the federal government's coronavirus relief package.

In letters obtained by NPR, the Small Business Administration, which administers the [Paycheck Protection Program](#), informs local affiliates that they are ineligible under the program's rules intended to limit the funds to small businesses and nonprofit organizations. In total, the letters say, Planned Parenthood affiliates nationwide have applied for more than \$80 million through the forgivable-loan program, which was set up through the [CARES Act](#).

Under the [program's rules](#), small businesses and nonprofits with fewer than 500 employees can apply for forgivable loans. Planned Parenthood officials say local member organizations that fall within those limitations — not the larger, national group — applied for and received the funds.

The Small Business Administration asks affiliates to either return the funds or respond with documentation demonstrating eligibility for the program. The letters end with a warning that "if SBA determines that a borrower made a knowingly false certification" on a loan application, the agency "may refer the borrower for appropriate civil or criminal penalties."

Sponsor Message

In a [letter](#) to Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, an SBA official notes that the organization in Washington, D.C., applied for a little more than \$1.3 million in funds through the program, which was set up to help small businesses keep employees on payroll during the crisis. A [similar letter](#) to Planned Parenthood of Delaware references a loan application for \$496,225. The letters were first reported by Fox News.

Stephanie Fraim, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida, told NPR that her organization received a little over \$2 million, mostly to cover employee paychecks.

"The economic uncertainty at that moment was profound, and the two weeks while we waited for this loan, we spent having some very tough conversations about what we would do if we didn't get this loan," Fraim said.

Jacqueline Ayers, vice president of government relations and public policy at the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said the move by SBA is part of a politically motivated "relentless attack" by the Trump administration, which [opposes abortion rights](#) and has taken steps to restrict access to abortion and [contraception](#).

Since early on in the pandemic, groups opposed to abortion rights have expressed concern that coronavirus relief funds not be directed to organizations like Planned Parenthood. Many Planned Parenthood clinics provide abortions along with other reproductive health services, but using federal funds to pay for abortions is prohibited in most cases.

Several [Republican senators](#) also are calling on Planned Parenthood affiliates to return funds distributed through the Paycheck Protection Program. Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship, has said that taken together, Planned Parenthood affiliates have too many employees nationwide to be eligible under the program's rules. He said he wants the Small Business Administration to [open an investigation](#) into why and how the Planned Parenthood affiliates received the money.

In an interview with NPR, Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.) also said Planned Parenthood [should return](#) the funds, as several prominent large businesses and organizations have done after coming under criticism.

"That's what the Los Angeles Lakers have done. That's what Shake Shack has done. That's what Ruth's Chris [Steak House] has done," Lankford said. "So other organizations that it was exposed that they should not have taken the money have returned the money, so that would be the reasonable thing for them to be able to do."

Legal experts say the Paycheck Protection Program's eligibility rules are [somewhat unclear](#) and have shifted as the program has rolled out.

"They keep changing the rules," said Jessica Abrahams, who specializes in government contracting law at the firm [Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath](#). "So entities that qualified three weeks ago may not qualify today. There's a lot of confusion, a lot of concern."