

Supreme Court steps in to give Trump a foreign aid reprieve – and more. By [HELEN MURPHY](#), *Devex Newswire*, 27 Feb 2025



Newswire

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development newsletter

FEB. 27, 2025

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A judge ordered the Trump administration multiple times to unfreeze foreign aid. Instead, the administration terminated nearly 10,000 awards and went to the Supreme Court at the eleventh hour to avoid paying up.

Also in today's edition: How to think about the job search in this moment of crisis, and separating fact from fiction in Trump's claims about wasteful aid.

Highest authority

With just hours to go before a midnight judicial deadline to restore \$2 billion in frozen foreign aid, the Trump administration made it clear it's in no rush to pay its bills. **It went to the U.S. Supreme Court and won a temporary reprieve** after [Chief Justice John Roberts paused an earlier directive](#) issued by a U.S. District Court to release the funds.

“The district court’s underlying orders are erroneous,” wrote the Trump administration in an emergency motion to the Supreme Court last night after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit denied its appeal. “The government is doing what it reasonably can to comply in good faith.”

The plaintiffs in the case — including NGOs and for-profit contractors — would beg to differ that it's been a “good-faith” effort. Earlier in the day, instead of abiding by the judge's order to disperse the funds, **the administration terminated nearly 10,000 awards**, [claiming to have reached a “substantial completion” of the review process](#).

The cuts include 5,800 [USAID](#) awards and 4,100 [U.S. State Department](#) grants, **many of which had already been given waivers** for lifesaving humanitarian aid. Secretary of State Marco Rubio personally signed off on the terminations, insisting they serve the national interest. In doing so, **he eliminated 90% of USAID's contracts and grants**, decimating what was once the world's largest bilateral donor.

Where does that leave **organizations that have lost tens of millions of dollars**? Scrambling. The plaintiffs suing the Trump administration now have until noon tomorrow to respond to the court filings.

Read: [Supreme Court pauses order to release billions of dollars in foreign aid](#)

See also: [Nearly 10,000 awards cut from USAID, State Department](#)

Plus: [What do we know about USAID's 90-day review?](#)

Nobody's home, leave a message

Many of **these directives come late at night, or even on a Sunday**. One recent email announcing that thousands of USAID staff would be placed on administrative leave or terminated bore a line at the bottom of the notice telling employees they could contact a command center 24 hours a day for assistance.

But a source tells us that a message from the command center said: "For anyone asking the command center to give them their status. We don't have it. **I don't even have my status and they listed my team as one of the POCs.**" 📞

Children at risk

Navyn Salem, CEO of [Edesia](#), was in Sierra Leone last month when she got the devastating news — [Trump's 90-day freeze on U.S. foreign aid](#). The Rhode Island-based nonprofit, which produces high-nutrient food for malnourished

children, was ordered to halt operations.

“We sat there speechless,” she says. “It was **the only supply of lifesaving food for these children.**”

Thanks to urgent advocacy, USAID lifted Edesia’s stop-work order within a week — but many aid programs remained frozen, [leaving food shipments stranded and staff layoffs mounting](#), writes Devex Senior Editor Tania Karas. Now, Tania tells me, **Edesia is one of the many organizations that received contract termination notices** yesterday. While we’ll be closely watching the legal back-and-forth, it’s deeply uncertain how (or even if) lifesaving services will be available to these children.

“**The system is breaking,**” says a humanitarian aid official. “Supplies are not getting to people. We’ve got staff being fired across the board ... And you can’t run programs without staff.”

Read: [‘The system is breaking’ — US aid freeze threatens child malnutrition care](#)



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Mythbusters, Devex edition

CLAIM



REALITY



Trump and his team have been busy justifying the foreign aid freeze and USAID shake-up with some tall tales about how taxpayer money is spent. Trump claims USAID has been throwing “massive sums” into “ridiculous — and, in many cases, malicious — pet projects.” The reality? **USAID makes up less than 1% of total U.S. spending** and is the largest provider of global aid. So what’s really going on? My colleague Jesse Chase-Lubitz [separates fact from fiction](#). Here’s a taster of what she found:



Claim: USAID funded a “transgender opera” in Colombia and a transgender comic book in Peru.



Reality: These were State Department projects, not USAID. The opera got \$25,000 from the U.S. Embassy in Colombia, and the comic book was part of a U.S. education initiative in Peru.



Claim: The Trump administration blocked \$45 million for “diversity scholarships in Burma.”



Reality: Yep. USAID was funding scholarships for

marginalized students in Myanmar to study abroad, boosting democracy and countering China's influence. The program is now dead, leaving hundreds stranded.

What's the bottom line? **This isn't necessarily about waste — it's about politics.** The aid freeze is crippling key programs, shrinking U.S. influence, and hurting the world's most vulnerable.

Read: [How accurate are Donald Trump's claims about wasteful aid?](#) **Pro.**

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