

## Civil Rights Group Urges HHS to Audit Potentially Discriminatory Grants

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— Categories: Human Rights



A leading civil rights organization is urging the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to take a closer look at hundreds of federally funded grants it believes could be violating civil rights laws by discriminating based on race and ethnicity.

The Equal Protection Project, an advocacy group focused on defending equality under the law, recently sent a letter to HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. The letter, obtained by the Daily Caller News Foundation, highlights concerns about more than 700 active grants that reference improving outcomes for minority communities. While the organization

acknowledges that these goals may be well-intentioned, it warns that the way some programs are carried out could cross the line into unlawful discrimination.

“While such goals may be laudable, such aspirations cannot be permitted to turn into civil rights violations when implemented,” the letter states.

William Jacobson, founder of the Equal Protection Project, emphasized that HHS should hold grant recipients accountable if they are using taxpayer dollars in ways that exclude people because of their race. “When discrimination in eligibility takes place about medical-related programs, it does damage not just to the people who are excluded, but also to the healthcare system,” Jacobson said.

One example cited in the group’s complaint is the REACH Minority Fellowship Program, a one-year training fellowship administered by the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry and Yale School of Medicine. According to program materials, applicants must be from a “racial/ethnic minoritized population,” such as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander backgrounds. Participants can receive up to \$104,000 in funding to support their fellowship positions.

The Equal Protection Project argues that even though the federal grant terms do not explicitly limit eligibility to minority applicants, the way the program is run imposes discriminatory requirements. “It is reasonable to assume that the title of the grant program (‘Minority Fellowship Program’) encouraged such discrimination, even if by its terms the grant did not impose such an unlawful requirement,” the group wrote.

The organization is now calling for HHS to launch a thorough audit of these grants and take administrative action against any institutions found to be using discriminatory criteria. They believe this is necessary to ensure all applicants are treated fairly, regardless of race or ethnicity.

The Department of Health and Human Services has not yet responded to the request for comment. The outcome of this dispute could have significant implications for how federal grants designed to support underserved communities are structured and monitored in the future.

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