

RI federal judge strikes down block on immigration benefits

BY: CHRISTOPHER SHEA - JUNE 5, 2026 2:55 PM



📷 The exterior of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Johnston. (Photo by Christopher Shea/Rhode Island Current)

Rhode Island’s immigration service nonprofits are celebrating a decision by a federal judge Friday to toss the administration’s policy that froze permits and other benefits for applicants from nearly 40 countries subject to travel bans.

The [135-page ruling](#) by U.S. District Court Chief Judge John McConnell Jr. came in response to a March lawsuit led by two Providence-based nonprofits, Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island and Refugee Dream Center.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services policies left immigrants living in the country in an “indeterminate legal limbo” because of “anti-immigrant sentiments that it is forbidden from letting influence its decision-making,” McConnell, an Obama appointee, wrote.

“Indeed, the agency has violated the very immigration laws that Congress has charged it with administering, as well as the administrative laws that govern the agency’s actions.”

James Percival, legal counsel for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, called the ruling “sabotage.”

“The Left has been running the same gambit with so called ‘animus’ claims since 2017,” he said in an emailed response Friday. “It is sabotage dressed in legal clothing. It goes like this: (1) the admin is racist, (2) therefore a policy I don’t like is motivated by race, (3) therefore it is invalid. They have used it on virtually every Trump era Department of Homeland Security policy.”

He did not answer when asked if federal authorities plan to appeal.

Federal authorities suspended immigration work permits and related benefits in November following a Washington, D.C. shooting in which an Afghan national killed one National Guard member and wounded another.

In March, a coalition of nonprofit organizations and labor unions that represent and serve immigrant communities filed [a complaint](#), claiming the Trump administration’s actions violated the Administrative Procedure Act, the Immigration and Nationality Act, and the U.S. Constitution’s right to due process.

Dorcas International had hundreds of pending immigration benefits application cases that were put in limbo as a result of the Trump administration, according to its complaint.

“Dorcas International’s attorneys continue to invest time and resources preparing these cases, and monitoring ongoing cases, but the hold ensures that no case can reach a final decision,” the complaint stated. “This creates a challenging and ever-growing backlog of open cases that Dorcas International must continue to service at its low-cost fee structure, without any prospect of resolution.”

Milagro Sique, CEO of Dorcas International, celebrated McConnell’s ruling.

“These policies were wrong, plain and simple, and caused needless and profound fear and uncertainty for so many of our friends, neighbors, and coworkers,” she said in an emailed response Friday. “Having the judicial process work as intended – by upholding the rule of law – gives us some reassurance that all is not lost and allows those who have been impacted to move forward with their lives in a meaningful way.”

The Trump administration’s decision to suspend benefits for immigrants from countries deemed “high risk” similarly affected the Refugee Dream Center, including in its training program for immigrants no longer able to obtain or renew federal work authorization documents.

“They were wrong policies and today we have been vindicated,” Dr. Omar Bah, founder and co-executive director of Refugee Dream Center, said in a statement. “This ruling reaffirms the American doctrine of the rule of law, and place of refuge and equality for all that call it home.”