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Gonzaga University and City of Spokane Urge Reinstatement of Climate Resilience Funding Ahead of Extreme Summer Heat

Spokane, WA — Gonzaga University and the City of Spokane are calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to rescind the agency's May 2 notice to terminate a \$19.9 million federal grant awarded to support local climate resilience, public health, and workforce development. As the Inland Northwest enters its heat and wildfire season, termination of the Community Change Grant jeopardizes vulnerable community members and undermines efforts to prepare for increasingly severe climate-related events.

The grant, awarded through the Climate and Environmental Justice Community Change program, funds critical community-based initiatives in Spokane and the Inland Northwest. These include the installation of high-efficiency HVAC and air filtration systems in 300 low-income homes, the development of five Community Resilience Hubs to serve as safe spaces during extreme weather, the re-granting of \$2.6 million to local nonprofits and faith-based organizations, and job training programs in clean energy and energy efficiency.

More than 94% of the grant is allocated for direct services and community infrastructure — resources designed to protect lives, reduce energy costs, support small businesses, and build long-term resilience. With Spokane facing rising temperatures and increased wildfire smoke exposure, the loss of this funding poses immediate risks to public health and safety.

"We are concerned not only about the process by which this decision was made, but even more so about its very real consequences for the people we serve," said Dr. Thayne McCulloh, president of Gonzaga University. "Our mission is to educate and serve. This grant enables our community to learn how to deal with dangerous climate conditions and help the thousands of community members who lack the ability to protect themselves from the extreme heat and wildfire smoke that is all too common in the Inland Northwest today."

"This work has already begun in good faith under a legally binding agreement," said Spokane Mayor Lisa Brown. "The decision to terminate this grant puts lives at risk and undermines locally led solutions to climate and public health challenges. Make no mistake, recent history shows just how critical this funding is to ensure the health, safety, and economic stability of so many Spokane families."

Gonzaga and the City of Spokane believe the termination lacks legal justification and contradicts the terms of the cooperative agreement. Courts have already issued preliminary rulings against similar efforts to halt climate-related funding under the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, citing concerns about overreach and constitutional violations.

The goals of the program — improving energy efficiency, reducing public health risks, and expanding economic opportunity — align with bipartisan policy objectives and are rooted in data-driven, community-focused strategies.

“This is not about politics,” Brown said. “This is about people. It’s about protecting neighbors and investing in a healthier, safer future for Spokane.”

Gonzaga and the City call on its legislators representing the many community members impacted by the grant’s termination to intervene for their constituents by urging immediate reinstatement of the grant; affirming the importance of this funding for Spokane’s health, economy, and safety; and requesting a formal explanation from the EPA regarding the legal basis for the termination and the impact on other grants in Washington State.

The risks are real. Four years ago, 19 area residents died from the effects of extreme heat and smoke. Every day without funding -- without high efficiency air conditioning and filtration in homes, community cooling centers, and life-saving resources — places thousands of Spokane area families at unnecessary risk once again. Gonzaga University and the City of Spokane urge moving beyond a political agenda, immediately reinstating funding for the Community Change Grant, and completing this life-saving program for our residents now, and for years to come.

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