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From sidewalks to Meals on Wheels, Trump cuts could hurt

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Washington money affects lives in cities like Sacramento and Fresno in ways few realize, until the capital's leaders try to take the money away. And that's what could happen this fall.

Fear of losing Community Development Block Grants, the federal program that helps pay for libraries, home repair services, sidewalks, after school programs and other urban needs, is motivating cities such as Sacramento, Fresno and others all across America to mobilize against the cuts.

President Donald Trump wants to eliminate funding for the 43-year-old program, one of Washington's key strategies for helping pay for a wide variety of community-based services.

Chances are Congress won't go along, at least not with everything. But cuts of any size would be felt hard in Fresno. The city is struggling. The median home price is a little over \$200,000, according to the real estate website Zillow. In April, unemployment in Fresno County was [8.8 percent](#), well above the state average, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. More than a quarter of the city's residents [lived in poverty in 2015](#), according to Census Bureau data.

Fresno gets \$6 million annually from the community program, money used for infrastructure projects, after school programs, home owner repair programs, grants for job training and hot meals for seniors.

"There's a lot of poor people in the city that depend on these kinds of programs," said Mayor Lee Brand, a Republican.

The funds help pay for projects such as sidewalks, street lights, tot lots, and improvements to streets and park facilities in low-income neighborhoods, according to Mark Standriff, director of communications for the city of Fresno.

Nationally, the CDBG program now costs about gets about \$3 billion annually. Cities and counties in California got more than \$300 million in CDBG funds in the last fiscal year, according to data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which runs the program.

The Trump administration wants it cut because, HUD said in a news release, "Since 1980, and most recently in 2013, HUD studies found that CDBG is increasingly not well targeted to the poorest communities and has not demonstrated a measurable impact on communities."

Urban interests are protesting. [The U.S. Conference of Mayors](#), a nonpartisan group of the nation's 1,400 largest cities, sent a letter last month to key members of the House Appropriations Committee urging them to preserve funding for the CDBG program.

In Sacramento, CDBG funds are used for a wide range of development projects from improving library services to digging wells to provide clean drinking water, according to La Shelle Dozier, executive director of the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency, which administers CDBG funds for the city and county of Sacramento.

Among other things, she said CDBG funds were used to provide more than 447,000 meals in to seniors in 2016 through the Meals on Wheels program.

"It really runs the gamut but it does provide a level of amenities and service to those underserved communities that they would go without if not for this funding," Dozier said.

David Morikawa, program director for Meals on Wheels in Sacramento County, said the organization serves about 2,000 seniors every day. The majority, about 1,500 seniors, get those meals delivered to their homes. Those who are able to leave their homes can eat at one of 21 cafes set up at senior center, community centers and churches around the county.

Morikawa said the CDBG program is an important source of funds and that Meals on Wheels is "waiting to see what happens" with the proposed budget. If Meals on Wheels is forced to cut back, Morikawa said those seniors may have to rely on fast food and would not get adequate nutrition.

Together, the city and county of Sacramento receive more than \$9 million annually in CDBG funds, money that Dozier said would be difficult to replace. She said the argument that cities can get funding from other sources is "wishful thinking."

This is not the first time the CDBG program has been targeted for cuts. Funding was reduced significantly in 1986, 2006 and 2011, during the administrations of Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Dozier said that CDBG funds can be used to get additional matching funding from the state government and so the effects of the cut would be compounded as cities would lose not only the federal money, but other funding sources that stem from it.

"When people just see the amount of money they think 'Well, that's not a lot of money' but then when you look at how you're able to leverage that then that's a huge loss," she said.

Chris Edwards, an economist with the libertarian Cato Institute, supports the elimination of the CDBG program. He said the federal government should not be responsible for local spending and that programs like CDBG contribute to bloated bureaucracy.

"I think local services ought to be paid for locally. Period," he said.

Edwards said it would be more efficient for state and local governments to foot the bill rather than have the money come from Washington.

"Local governments know their own needs, they should raise the money themselves," he said.

