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Trump's budget ax comes for Chelsea's Roca, an antiviolence mainstay

By [Adrian Walker](#) Globe Columnist, Updated April 30, 2025, 10:55 a.m.



Josiah Ancrum (left) met with Roca violence prevention and outreach worker Mischael Morency in January. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Molly Baldwin had been half-expecting the news that landed in her inbox one morning last week.

It was a letter from the Justice Department informing her that a \$6 million violence intervention grant to Roca — the [Chelsea-based](#) crime prevention agency she leads — was being terminated, effective immediately.

In typically convoluted language, some bureaucrat in Washington asserted that Roca's work is no longer "aligned" with the Trump administration's priorities.

The email listed those priorities as combatting violent crime, protecting American children, supporting victims of trafficking and sexual assault, and working with law enforcement.

"We were terminated for supposedly not doing all the things we actually do," Baldwin told me last week.

Because some of the money in the grant — which dates back to the Biden administration — has already been spent, the actual amount snatched away is approximately \$4 million. But that isn't small change for a nonprofit that depends on federal and state government for roughly two-thirds of its \$36 million budget. On Tuesday, Baldwin began laying off employees whose jobs were funded by the lost grants.

Roca was founded in 1988 by a group of activists, including Baldwin, to address the problem of youth delinquency in Chelsea. Its staff works with thousands of troubled youth every year: helping them to navigate the justice system, offering job training, teaching skills to defuse the kinds of confrontations that can result in violence.

It's also trained 7,500 police and corrections officers, using [tools rooted in cognitive behavioral therapy](#), to de-escalate conflicts. Besides Chelsea and Boston, it also operates violence prevention programs in Springfield, Hartford, and Baltimore. Its programs in all those cities will be affected by the cuts.

Over the years, I've personally witnessed Roca street workers chase around young adults to encourage them to get involved in its programs, or help them to resolve legal cases that could make it much harder for them to get a job, or find a place to live. It has supported victims of sex abuse and trafficking for years.

It's an organization that is both intensely data-driven and as grassroots as it gets.

"If you really want to reduce violent crime, why would you remove the funds of the groups that actually engage with young people and help them make changes?" Baldwin asked rhetorically.

A \$4 million cut probably doesn't feel like a big deal to someone sending out form letters from Washington. But it cuts deeply in a place like Chelsea, where even local anchors are in a constant fight for the resources to do their work.

Baldwin's biggest fear is that this cut is just the beginning. It's just a matter of time before [cuts in federal funding trickle down to state and local governments as well](#).

But Baldwin insists that Roca will make it through.

"I do want to say this: We're not going anywhere," Baldwin said. "We will get through this. We may look entirely different, but we're going to figure this out and get through."

But there shouldn't be so much to figure out, to wade through. Among the most infuriating features of President Trump's first 100 days is his insistence that anything he doesn't like is illegitimate. Whether we're talking about deportations, or eliminating the Department of Education, or slashing criminal justice programs, there's nothing that qualifies as meaningful discussion or debate.

Instead, they communicate through some mindless emails informing people that their work is no longer worth supporting.

It might help if the people making these decisions actually dealt with the young people a group like Roca serves, the people whose lives they are affecting. But they would probably consider that inefficient.

Roca hasn't survived for 40 years without dealing with shifting political fortunes, and the loss of one grant won't kill it.

But make no mistake: The sheer callousness of this administration is going to change lives. Especially, as Baldwin noted, in a place where many people already live close to the margins.

"There are lots of Chelseas all over the country," Baldwin said. "If you start taking away the few resources, it just puts a greater strain on people, only makes things harder. And when people don't feel good, things aren't safe."

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