

MUSLIM BAN UNLAWFULLY TARGETS U.S. RESIDENTS SEEKING CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION STATUS, CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS SUE

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SEATTLE – Today, civil and immigrant rights groups asked a federal court to lift the unconstitutional ban that blocks Muslim immigrants lawfully living in the United States from becoming U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and asylees, among other things.

The class action lawsuit challenges provisions of President Donald Trump’s January 27, 2017 executive order suspending the issuance of visas and other immigration benefits to nationals of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Immigration attorneys have now learned from leaked documents that the order is being applied to immigrants already lawfully residing within the United States who have pending applications for asylum, lawful permanent residence and other immigration benefits.

The government has suspended action on all pending immigration applications for individuals from the seven countries identified in the executive order for 90 days.

In addition, the lawsuit alleges that the government’s “extreme vetting” of people applying for citizenship and permanent residency under the executive order and an existing program known as CARRP violates federal laws and due process. The vetting program is designed to delay and deny citizenship and permanent residency to Muslim immigrants and immigrants from Muslim majority countries, despite their eligibility under the law.

Tens of thousands of immigrants residing in the United States are now affected by these unlawful actions.

Plaintiffs Abdiqafar Wagafe and Mehdi Ostadhassan are practicing Muslims and long-time U.S. residents. Like many seeking naturalization, green cards, visas or asylum, they have been subjected to the unconstitutional executive order and an unlawful vetting program that bars them from obtaining the citizenship and immigration status they seek.

“This ban seeks to shut me out of the United States, simply because of my religion and my nationality, but my life and my future is here,” said Ostadhassan, an engineering professor at the University of North Dakota who has been living in the U.S. since 2009 and has an American wife and son. “This ban goes against everything I have known the United States to stand for. Welcoming immigrants is part of the American tradition. I have experienced this myself.”

Ostadhassan applied for his green card in 2014, and has been left waiting since.

“Applying the Executive Order to residents of the United States defies the plain language of the statute the President purports to rely on,” said Matt Adams, Legal Director for Northwest Immigrant Rights Project. “Moreover, any program targeting Muslims violates basic Constitutional protections.”

“By freezing Muslim immigrants out of the ability to become U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents, the President’s unconstitutional ban now takes aim at the very system that has made the United States a pluralistic nation,” said Jennie Pasquarella, immigrants’ rights director for the ACLU of California and senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Southern California.

“The halt to the processing of applications has caused fear and anxiety to thousands of noncitizens who legally are entitled to benefits. This decision is irrational and illegal,” said Stacy Tolchin, an immigration attorney in Los Angeles who represents many Muslim clients.

“These xenophobic policies do not make us safer,” said Trina Realmuto, Litigation Director for the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild. “Instead, they undermine American values.”

The lawsuit was brought forth by attorneys from Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, Law Offices of Stacy Tolchin, the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, the ACLU of Washington, and Perkins Coie LLP.

The complaint can be read [here](#).