NEWS

"At night the fog was thick and full of light, and sometimes voices."
ERIN BOW (PLAIN KATE) AUTHOR

City joins suit challenging conditions for federal funds

BY ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH
STAFF REPORTER

New Haven joined eight other American cities and counties on Monday in suing the Trump administration for alleged "unlawful conditions" included in the Department of Homeland Security's recently updated terms for receiving federal grants.

Chicago, the suit's lead plaintiff, along with Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Minneapolis, New York City, Ramsey County, Minn., Saint Paul and New Haven, claimed in the lawsuit that the "Executive Branch has now determined to use this critical federal funding as a cudgel, threatening to hamstring local governments' emergency-management functions unless they acquiesce to unrelated Executive domestic policy goals."

The nine cities and counties take issue with sections of the DHS's updated terms and conditions that require grant recipients to agree not to "operate any programs that advance or promote DEI, DEIA, or discriminatory equity ideology" and to agree to comply with all past and future executive orders.

A DHS spokesperson wrote in an email to the News that the lawsuit obstructs the president's agenda. Recipients of federal funds, the spokesperson added, are required to follow anti-discrimination laws and cannot use funds for climate activism or for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. FEMA has put in place new controls to ensure that all grant program activity follows the law, the spokesperson wrote.

At issue in New Haven is $93,597 awarded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's port security grant program, which would fund maintenance, upgrades and expansions to the camera systems around the city's port, according to Mayor Justin Elicker.

Those cameras are used to respond to incidents within the port — the busiest between New York and Boston — per Rebecca Bombero, a city administrator.

At a Monday press conference, Elicker said that the new grant stipulations "are ones that the City of New Haven cannot abide by, both because it does not align with our values, but also because it is just not practical for any municipality to be able to agree to such requirements."

Michael Bowler, an assistant counsel for New Haven, said on Monday that the DHS's new terms and conditions will apply to federal grants from all agencies.

"We'll be continually applying for federal grants, like the city always does," Bowler said, "but the standard terms and conditions now have these troubling terms with them, which we have to decide whether we will accept."

The mayor described the new guidelines, along with President Donald Trump's executive orders, as "intentionally vague." The DHS did not immediately respond to the News' request for comment about the new guidelines.

The city submitted an application in mid-August for over $2 million in grants to fund various port-related projects, according to Kayla Bland, the city's emergency operations director. In September, New Haven was offered funding for just one project — the camera upgrades.

Bland said that she thought that the grant was approved because it "fit within" the Trump administration's "priorities of cyber security and physical security."

The deadline to sign the grant is Nov. 27. Elicker said he hopes that a federal judge will grant the plaintiffs a preliminary injunction before then, which would prevent the federal government from halting funding.

But if New Haven does not receive the money, Elicker said, "we'll have to make a decision on whether we want to keep this infrastructure there — keep old, dilapidated infrastructure that may break — fund it in another way, increase taxes to fund these things."

Monday's lawsuit, filed in a Chicago federal court, is the third that New Haven has joined against the Trump administration. In February, along with San Francisco, Portland and King County, Washington, New Haven sued the federal government for allegedly targeting sanctuary city jurisdictions, and in March, it joined five other cities and eleven nonprofits in suing the government over funding freezes to environmental and climate projects.

A federal court granted two preliminary injunctions in the sanctuary cities case.

As in both of those suits, the Public Rights Project, a progressive, California-based legal advocacy nonprofit, is helping represent New Haven and covering many of its legal costs, according to Elicker.

The mayor said that despite the aggressive posture he has taken toward the Trump administration, he is not worried about drawing more attention to New Haven than it otherwise might receive.

"I hear from some of my mayoral colleagues out there that they don't want to make their cities a target," Elicker said. "Now is a time that we should not be hiding. Now is a time that we should be standing up and fighting for the values of our community, both because at some point we're all going to be a target anyway, but more importantly, because this is the right thing to do."

Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem is the lead defendant in the case.

Contact **ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH** *at elijah.hurewitz-ravitch@yale.edu.*

New shop to open in former Donut Crazy location

BY MAYA CHATTERJEE
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

New signs at 290 York Street signal the opening of "Glaze and Grind" in the storefront formerly occupied by Donut Crazy, which closed in the spring after its license was suspended for violating sales tax regulations.

The Donut Crazy storefront in New Haven was opened in 2016 by owner Jason Wojnarowski and shuttered this past March by the Connecticut Department of Revenue Services. The company has also closed its four other locations across Connecticut after a series of evictions.

Despite similarities between Donut Crazy and the new company, Glaze and Grind — including two shared locations and similar menus — managers at Glaze and Grind stressed that the new shop is an entirely separate venture. Donut Crazy owner Wojnarowski was present at the location, helping set up Glaze and Grind, on at least two days last week.

Jimmy Lyons, one of Glaze and Grind's main operators, described the company as a newly established Connecticut-based business created by a team of six professionals in the restaurant industry.

"We're pretty much just joining forces, putting a team of Avengers together in the industry and trying to come up with something interesting and unique," Lyons said. "It's a totally new company comprised of existing owners and operators of other companies."

Lyons and several of his partners, including Mauro Tropeano, Marc Goldberg, Jason Garelick, Joe Grosso and Howard Saffan, each bring experience from their respective business ventures. Lyons is the owner of North Fork Doughnut Company on Long Island and co-founded Grounds Donut House in Danbury with Tropeano.

After the closure of Donut Crazy, Lyons and Tropeano saw the vacated storefronts as well-suited for Glaze and Grind.

"We saw the opportunity with the old Donut Crazy spaces and we thought this would be a perfect fit for us to launch our brand where we wouldn't have too much overhead," Lyons said.

Lyons emphasized that there would be no crossover between the Donut Crazy and Glaze and Grind staff. Yet some of the current staff have connections to the previous business.

"As far as any sort of leadership that was at the helm of Donut Crazy, there's no throughline there whatsoever," he said. "Anybody that's in an equity or ownership or partnership position in Glaze and Grind has nothing to do with Donut Crazy."

Saffan, one of the operators of Glaze and Grind, also owns the Hartford HealthCare Amphitheater, which has partnered with and promoted Donut Crazy. Additionally, Saffan's real estate company, Bishop Development III, LLC, served as the landlord for Donut Crazy's Shelton, Conn., location. A 2025 lawsuit filed by Bishop against Donut Crazy owner Wojnarowski alleges the tenant's failure to pay rent.



CAMILA PEREZ / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Following Donut Crazy's statewide closures, a new team of restaurant owners is launching a similar shop, Glaze and Grind.

Grosso, one of the owners of Glaze and Grind who oversees construction, told the News that he joined the project through Saffan.

The News spoke with Wojnarowski at the York Street site last week. He identified himself as "Jason Wojo," and said he was assisting Glaze and Grind with construction and design. Wojnarowski added that no one working at Glaze and Grind had worked for Donut Crazy in the past. He did not comment on the closure of Donut Crazy.

"We are just starting to put the finishing touches on. We kept the layout, but it's all new art and paint," Wojnarowski said of the construction process.

Both Grosso and Lyons said Wojnarowski's involvement would be limited to transitional and consulting responsibilities.

"Jason has no equity or stake or partnership in the new company at all," Lyons said. "It was more just involvement on the end of taking over the leases and transitioning us into the new spaces. He helped with a little bit of design because he had a creative background."

Lyons added that Glaze and Grind has taken some of Wojnarowski's guidance during the process.

"We took a couple pages from his book on what worked for Donut Crazy and what we think would work moving forward."

Lyons emphasized that Glaze and Grind is beginning with a clean slate.

"We're just excited to bring something new and unique to New Haven and to Shelton," Lyons said. "We're really excited to be part of the community."

Glaze and Grind will begin staff training on Wednesday and intends to open at the end of this week, according to Lyons.

Adele Haeg contributed reporting.

Contact **MAYA CHATTERJEE** *at maya.chatterjee@yale.edu.*

New Haven Public Schools unveils line-item budget

BY SABRINA THALER
STAFF REPORTER

New Haven Public Schools released a more detailed version of its 2025-26 fiscal year budget Monday night, the culmination of a months-long process to meet union members' calls for increased financial transparency.

At a virtual meeting of the Board of Education's Finance and Operations Committee on Monday, the school district's chief financial officer, Amilcar Hernandez, presented a spreadsheet that included the district's budget allocations for more than 100 line items, including salaries, electricity and transportation.

"Whereas earlier documents showed only the general funds budget, we now are showing special funds and interdistrict funds, as well, and tracking projected expenditures across these three categories," NHPS spokesperson Justin Harmon wrote in an email. "We believe this change will give people a far better understanding of where our funding comes from and where it goes."

The district's total budget is over $331 million, more than a third of which comes from special funds — 16 external grants, mostly from the state and federal governments — and state-administered interdistrict funds, according to the line-item budget spreadsheet.

Members of the city's teachers' union, the New Haven Federation of Teachers, have demanded that the district release a more detailed line-item budget as a measure of transparency. Over 40 teachers and union members gathered at a Board of Education meeting in late September, some toting signs that urged NHPS to "show us the money."

Board of Education Vice President Matthew Wilcox, who also serves as the chair of the finance and operations committee, said the newly released document reflects updated data from previous drafts, including up-to-date personnel expenditures and the precise dollar amounts NHPS received from grants.

When the school district released the initial draft of its 2025-26 fiscal year budget in the spring, it projected a budget deficit of more than $23.2 million, according to a press release published in the New Haven Independent. The district conducted a series of mitigation efforts, including the elimination of 76 vacant staff positions, the closure of one school and the merging of two schools.

After the Board of Alders voted to set aside $3 million in surplus state funding to a reserve for education earlier this month, NHPS narrowed its projected budget deficit to under $1 million, a step which Wilcox told the News would help the district prevent layoffs during the current school year.

At Monday's meeting, Hernandez noted the significance of outside grants, labeled as special funds in the budget, in covering some of the district's major costs, including teacher salaries. This year, the district will receive roughly $81 million in special funds.

Last fiscal year, the district received $107 million in grants, according to a separate presentation Hernandez gave at Monday's meeting. He said that next fiscal year, the district's supply of special funds could decline to the low $70 million range, bringing the total budget further from the $350 million he said it would need to meet the school district's needs.

"If we cannot sustain this level of special funding, there's no other funding for us to use to replace whatever those costs are," Hernandez told the committee, referring to pandemic-era federal grants that have run out. "If we are able to receive more special funds, or we're able to receive more general funds through the state, then we're able to alleviate the pressure that special funds have to cover some of the items that normally could be covered by general funds."

NHFT President Leslie Blatteau said in a phone interview that the new document is a "step in the right direction," but that she would like to see more detail added to certain line items, including the "Other Contractual Services" item, which comprises seven percent of the budget.

A tab in the spreadsheet entitled "Line Item Descriptions" includes details about 23 of the budget items. "Other Contractual Services" comprises "contracts for cleaning, professional and technical development of school district personnel including instructional, administrative and service employees," according to the document.

Hernandez said that he would continue to field questions and update the document as community members request more details.

"I think that in the future, that will be the theme of our budget process: transparency, and making sure that there's a trust relationship between us and the community, that they understand how we're using the funding, how we're allocating the funding, how we're implementing equity across all these pieces," Hernandez said to the committee.

The school district's 2025-26 fiscal year began on July 1.

Contact **SABRINA THALER** *at sabrina.thaler@yale.edu.*