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MORE THAN 25 ORGANIZATIONS FILE AMICUS BRIEF TO RELEASE WISCONSIN ORDER HALTING \$4 BILLION IN LOAN FORGIVENESS FOR BIPOC FARMERS

MADISON, Wis. — On behalf of the Rural Coalition, the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project and 23 additional farm, rural, environmental, health and civil rights groups, the Southern Poverty Law Center filed an [amicus brief](#) yesterday asking a federal court in Wisconsin to allow the distribution of \$4 billion in loan forgiveness set aside by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to correct decades of injustice, systemic racism and admitted discriminatory behavior by the federal government.

The assistance package was part of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) signed into law by President Joe Biden in March. On June 10, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) subverting the will of Congress and stopping relief to over 17,000 Black, Indigenous and other farmers of color who have suffered historic, systemic and ongoing discrimination in USDA lending programs.

“Debt relief is something that minority farmers desperately need as they try to recover from the damage that COVID-19 has disproportionately inflicted on their businesses and families,” said Keisha Stokes-Hough, senior supervising attorney for the Economic Justice Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center. “Congress granted this relief because farmers of color have borne the brunt of the economic downturn due to systemic and current discrimination. As a result, farmers of color are at the greatest risk of failure. The American Rescue Plan is an important first step in addressing decades of lending and aid discrimination in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the will of Congress must not be subverted.”

The USDA has a decades-long track record of discriminating against Black, Indigenous and other farmers of color. For example, USDA distributed \$9.2 billion in aid to farmers in 2020 under the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. Less than 3% of that relief went to a category of producers defined by the USDA as being underserved by federal farm programs and which includes farmers of color. With this loan forgiveness plan, Congress directed the USDA to provide relief to socially disadvantaged farmers. The groups supporting the brief say delaying the distribution of these funds puts more BIPOC farmers in danger of going out of business or falling even further behind their white counterparts. The brief includes statements from BIPOC farmers who will experience irreparable harm from this delay in federal support.

Yesterday, the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida issued a preliminary injunction to further delay the relief to BIPOC provided by Congress in the ARPA. This decision and the additional lawsuits that are continuing to be filed only seek to further put our producers of color further in financial peril, take them off their lands, and inhibit their centuries long struggle for equity in agriculture. Our representative organizations will be exploring further action to protect our BIPOC producers’ rights, as well as their equity and inclusion to receive the relief they have long been denied.

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More than 200 groups have [signed a statement](#) in support of immediately distributing the relief, saying that this landmark piece of legislation is desperately needed to correct ongoing systemic discrimination and to restore the rights of BIPOC farmers to pursue landownership and agriculture on an equal playing field.

Organizations joining the Rural Coalition, the Intertribal Agriculture Council and the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project on the brief include:

- NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council)
- Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund
- National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association
- American Indian Mothers, Inc.
- Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation
- Cottage House Incorporation
- Family Farm Defenders
- Kansas Black Farmers Association
- Land Stewardship Project
- National Young Farmers Coalition
- Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc.
- Operation Spring Plant, Inc.
- Texas Coalition of Rural Landowners
- World Farmers
- Farm Aid
- The Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor (HEAL) Food Alliance
- National Family Farm Coalition
- The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- The Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA
- California Farm Link
- Community Farm Alliance
- Women, Food and Agriculture Network
- Steward Holdings

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