

# Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty: Warns of lawsuit against DEI grant program in Wisconsin

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**The News:** The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) [issued a formal cease-and-desist](#) to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the ColorBold Business Association, SCORE Mentors, and UW-Madison regarding the “Entrepreneur of Color Collective Grant” (ECC Grant). The grant, funded by a \$95,000 WEDC investment from Governor Tony Evers, illegally bars business owners from applying based solely on their skin color. WILL is prepared to sue to ensure that every Wisconsin entrepreneur, regardless of race, has an equal shot at success.

**The Quotes:** WILL Managing Vice President and Deputy Counsel, Dan Lennington, stated: “The Evers Administration is yet again engaged in explicit race discrimination, this time telling business owners they can’t get help because they are the wrong race. This is illegal race discrimination, and the Evers Administration’s scheme to launder this money through private companies just makes the violation worse. These parties are on notice – reverse course now to avoid a costly lawsuit that they will surely lose.”

**Background:** The ECC Grant is a race-based \$2,500 business grant program that includes access to opportunities such as workshops, “shared learning pods,” mentorship meetings, and access to a “community navigator.” The program is exclusively open to “entrepreneurs of color,” requiring applicants to identify their race and ethnicity. In exchange for the funding, successful applicants must commit to specific performance, including bi-weekly virtual workshops, monthly SCORE

mentor meetings, and active participation in “shared learning pods.”

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**WILL’s Legal Argument:** This program violates the United States Constitution’s guarantee of equality. It also violates numerous federal laws, such as the Civil Rights Acts of 1866, which guarantees that all people have the right to make and enforce contracts regardless of race, and the Ku Klux Klan Act, which prohibits race discrimination or conspiracies to violate civil rights based on race. Federal civil-rights laws apply to both private actors and government officials.

**Similar Programs Ruled Unconstitutional:** In 2023, WILL represented clients from Texas, Wisconsin, and Florida in a federal lawsuit against the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA). Our lawsuit alleged then, as it will in this potential case against the state of Wisconsin, the agency violated the Equal Protection Doctrine, which guarantees that all individuals must be treated equally, without regard to race. A federal judge agreed with WILL and declared the MBDA’s race-based criteria—which formed the basis of all programming at MBDA—unconstitutional. In that case, [WILL was awarded over \\$300,000 in legal fees.](#)

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- [Letter](#), February 2026

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