



PO Box 2097 • South Burlington, Vermont 05407 • t: 802.495.1378

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CONTACT:

Alexandra MacLean

1-802-272-0443

The Ben & Jerry's Foundation Announces Suspension of Operations Following Funding Cutoff by Unilever/Magnum

After 40 years of supporting grassroots social change, the Foundation will be forced to suspend operations unless it obtains a favorable ruling in its legal challenge

South Burlington, VT, - The Ben & Jerry's Foundation today announced it will suspend operations as of December 31, 2026, unless it obtains a favorable ruling in its legal challenge to its loss of funding. The Foundation is actively pursuing that challenge which is expected to extend into next year and is fully committed to seeing it through. This year-end suspension of operations follows the April 2025 decision by Unilever's spinoff, The Magnum Ice Cream Company (TMICC), to cut the Foundation's funding and its more recent mandate for the Foundation to vacate its corporate office by today, July 15, 2026. Without these essential resources, the Foundation cannot continue its work.

"After forty years of investing in grassroots organizations working to make the world a more just and better place, TMICC is causing us to shut down at exactly the moment that work is most urgently needed," said Liz Bankowski, President of the Board of Trustees. "While we've lost funding and been removed from our office, we stand firm in the belief that the law and the facts are on our side."

Since its founding, the Ben & Jerry's Foundation has been unwavering in its mission: to support progressive social change at the grassroots level and to engage Ben & Jerry's employees in that work. Last October, the Foundation celebrated its 40th anniversary, a milestone honoring thousands of small grassroots organizations whose work to advance justice, human dignity, and environmental protection was bolstered by the Foundation's early and often catalytic support. Beyond the national grants program, the withdrawal of funds also affects roughly \$600,000 contributed annually across Vermont through an employee match program and employee-directed local Community Action Team and Vermont Equity & Justice Grants.

For more than 25 years, following Unilever's acquisition of Ben & Jerry's in 2000, the Foundation operated without corporate interference - a true testament to the integrity of the original merger agreement. That agreement established an Independent Board to oversee the company's product integrity and historic social mission and provided for Foundation funding under an annual formula. The Foundation's independence was never questioned, even when it funded Migrant Justice during a period when that organization was considering a boycott of Ben & Jerry's. Rather than interfering, Ben and Jerry's, led by the Independent Board, responded by becoming the first dairy company to establish a human rights program designed and built by farm workers themselves.

"The Ben & Jerry's Foundation was a key early funder for our work; they helped us get to where we are today," said Will Lambek, of Migrant Justice. "They believed in the human rights vision of Vermont farmworkers, even when it brought us into direct conflict with the company itself. The Foundation's decision to fund Migrant Justice while we were campaigning against Ben & Jerry's was a testament to its independence, courage, and integrity. They have brought that same integrity to all of their funding decisions over the past forty years."

Everything changed in early 2025, when Unilever restructured its ice cream businesses under a new corporate entity, TMICC. Using a pretextual governance review and a promised but never-disclosed audit, TMICC moved to remove a Foundation trustee and members of Ben and Jerry's Independent Board and to cut off funding to the Foundation. The Foundation joined the Independent Board in a legal challenge under the merger contract, the case that is currently pending in federal court in New York.

"We are a \$6 million foundation," said Bankowski. "TMICC is a multi-billion-dollar multinational corporation. This is exactly the kind of David and Goliath fight our grantees face every day – and like them we are not backing down. It breaks our hearts that we are being forced to step back at such an urgent time, when community organizations across the country who rely on funders like us are facing growing resistance in their fights for justice, human dignity, and environmental protection. We urge other funders to step forward and support grassroots activism. Local organizing has never been more critical."

The Foundation is deeply grateful to its dedicated staff, Becca Golden, Lisa Pendolino, and Dana Jeffery, whose combined 80 years of service reflect the depth of commitment that has defined the Foundation's culture. It also thanks the hundreds of Ben & Jerry's employees who served on grant-making committees and participated in learning tours over the years, bringing the company's social mission to life in the company's day-to-day operations.

Founded in 1985, the Ben & Jerry's Foundation has provided funding and support to hundreds of grassroots organizations working for progressive social change across the United States, with a focus on community organizing, environmental justice, racial equity, and human rights.

