Big layoffs hit Boston-based health firm

USAID funding cuts are blamed

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A Boston-based international public health firm laid off half of its employees last week after the Trump administration's freeze on foreign aid cut off most of its funding.

Approximately 1,100 employees of the JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. were laid off across the company's US and international offices, a spokesperson said in an email to the Globe. The spokesperson cited President Trump's move to dismantle the US Agency for International Development as the reason for the layoffs.

JSI, which absorbed the former John Snow, Inc. in 2023, is a consulting nonprofit that works with government agencies and local nonprofits to address public health issues, according to its website. Among its recent operations were efforts to address infectious diseases in sub-Saharan Africa, such as malaria and HIV.

"In this challenging moment, we remain committed to improving health and education here in the US and around the world," the spokesperson said.

Employees were told Wednesday that their last day with the company would be the end of the week, according to internal documents obtained by the Globe.

However, managers at JSI had warned staff that layoffs were imminent weeks earlier, after the Trump administration first announced its plans to freeze funding, according to a former JSI employee based in Boston who was laid off.

The employee, who asked not to be identified for fear of being targeted online, said that everyone in the company was "critically aware" of the danger posed by funding cuts. Immediately, the employee said, the company was forced to halt its immunization and nutrition programs.

Sixty-three percent of JSI's funding came from USAID, according to a company spokesperson.

"What I'm worried about is the projects that I supported in Pakistan and Zambia and Ethiopia," said the employee, part of JSI's international arm. "These projects, which had hundreds of people working on delivering life-saving services, have been cut down to four or five key staff to try and keep them on life support."

In 2023, JSI employed 3,775 employees around the world, over 800 of whom were based in the United States, according to documents on the company's website. The JSI spokesperson declined to answer questions about current staffing levels in the Boston area.

The former employee said that further cuts at the company are not out of the question.

"A lot of our domestic programs work with HIV populations — in particular our education and DEI programs," she said. "So everybody's on eggshells, waiting to see when things will happen."

Other New England-based companies have also experienced difficulties stemming from the administration's decision to gut USAID. A Vermont consulting firm let go of 76 employees last week, with more than $3 million in unpaid invoices for expenses accrued under federal contracts. And a Providence, R.I., company has reported canceled orders for its products and medical supplies for women and newborns.

The employee said she was considering independently funded public health work, though she opined that the private sector alone would likely never have the same reach as USAID-sponsored programs.

"I want to change the narrative that these development dollars are wasteful," she said. "I don't know how to do that because the megaphone is so loud. I want people to understand that this is really hurting a lot of Americans. ... There's going to be residual effects and ripple down effects across the board."

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