

Federal Judge Halts Education Department Layoffs, Preserving Key Programs for Now

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A federal judge has delivered a reprieve for the U.S. Department of Education's special education and civil rights offices, halting the Trump administration's controversial plan to gut the agency during the ongoing government shutdown. On October 16, Judge Susan Illston, of the U.S. District Court, for the Northern District of California temporarily enjoined the

administration's Reductions In Force (RIF), which would have eliminated more than 450 employees across the Department. Nearly all staff in the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education were to receive termination notices, and the Office for Civil Rights faced another round of cuts after losing half its staff earlier

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this year^[1]. The injunction follows litigation filed by employee unions and advocacy groups and prevents the administration from issuing additional RIF notices while the case proceeds.

The mass layoffs came just days after the Education Department had already let go of approximately 466 employees in a previous round of cuts. OSEP, which had about 90 staffers at the start of the year, was reduced to a

handful of workers, prompting advocates to warn that the department could not fulfill its responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Rehabilitation Services Administration and the already depleted Office for Civil Rights were also slated for severe staffing reductions^[2]. In her ruling, Judge Illston observed that it is “far from normal” for an administration to fire line-level civilian employees during a shutdown as a way to punish political opponents and noted that the administration may have lacked authority to let staff go while they were furloughed.



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Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, states receive federal funding in exchange for providing a Free Appropriate Public Education to students with disabilities and complying with procedural safeguards. OSEP oversees compliance, issues guidance, and monitors state performance, while the Office for Civil Rights enforces Title IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Eliminating these offices' staff jeopardizes the federal government's ability to enforce the law. The layoffs could violate the Administrative Procedure Act if they are arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to law, and they raise due process concerns for employees who did not receive adequate notice. They also implicate the Supremacy Clause because the federal government cannot unilaterally abandon statutory obligations without congressional authorization. Stakeholders caution that even with the injunction in place, ongoing litigation means the threat to IDEA enforcement and civil rights oversight remains.

"This case is about more than jobs; it's about the federal safeguards that protect vulnerable students," said Keith Altman, founder of [K Altman Law](#). "Without adequate staff in OSEP and the Office for Civil Rights, states may ignore their obligations under IDEA, Title IX, and Section 504. Although the judge's order pauses the layoffs, parents and advocates must remain vigilant. We urge the administration to restore staffing levels and recommit to enforcing civil rights laws."

Families, educators, and disability advocates concerned about the potential erosion of special education services and civil rights enforcement should contact K Altman Law for a consultation. Our advocates and attorneys assist parents with Individualized Education Program (IEP) disputes, due process hearings, complaints before the Office for Civil Rights, and litigation to enforce IDEA rights.

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