



---

## How Dismantling the U.S. ED Office for Civil Rights Impacts Students & Families

*Virtual Briefing | May 27, 2026 | 3-4 PM ET*

### **The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights is a Critical Federal Agency**

For millions of students and families, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) often stands as a last and sometimes only option to attend school free from discrimination when local systems fail.

Although states can and should do more to protect the rights of students, history shows that we cannot only look to states to carry out this duty. Congress charged the Department of Education (ED) to protect equal educational opportunity and created OCR to ensure that *every* student—regardless of race, color, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, and pregnancy or related medical conditions), disability, or age—will have their civil rights protected and enforced by the federal government.

Prior to January 2025, OCR has provided critical oversight and enforcement of students' civil rights, despite being persistently under-resourced and under-staffed.

- In 2024, OCR received an all-time high of 22,687 complaints filed in a single fiscal year.
- OCR resolved 56,383 of the 71,385 open cases it managed during the Biden-Harris administration, marking a 14% increase in case resolutions compared to the first Trump administration.
- OCR responded to students' and schools' needs by producing more policy resources in one fiscal year (FY2024) than any other in OCR's history.

### **The Changes to OCR Are Harming Students and Families**

Students and families who have filed complaints with OCR with the expectation that it would fulfill its legal obligation to enforce students' civil rights are now being ignored and left without redress. Countless others who have experienced discrimination since the changes at OCR have been chilled from filing new complaints, unable to seek and expect protection from the federal government, so they can pursue an education free from harm.

In March 2025, ED terminated OCR staff en masse, laying off 299 out of 575 employees and closing seven of OCR's 12 regional offices. As of December 2025, sources within ED report a backlog of over 24,000 pending complaints. Conversations with current attorneys at OCR

indicate that investigators who remained on staff after the 2025 reductions-in-force (“RIFs”) initially inherited about 1,000 cases each from the closed regional offices. More recently, it was estimated that most investigators were likely on track to inherit about 400 cases each. (In 2024, OCR had already noted that it was “unmanageable” for investigators to take on 71 cases each.)

As [Senator Sanders’ report](#) on OCR states, “while thousands of students waited for help, Trump’s OCR reached the fewest resolution agreements in at least 12 years.” Specifically, since January 2025, OCR has:

- Dismissed roughly 90% of discrimination complaints from students without review.
- Reached 78% fewer resolution agreements overall compared to the previous year, and the lowest rate in more than a decade.
- Reached zero resolution agreements involving sexual harassment, sexual violence, seclusion or restraint, racial harassment, or discriminatory school discipline—despite more than 2,700 pending cases.
- Reached nearly 79% fewer disability resolution agreements for students with disabilities, which make up the largest share of cases.
- Reached 91% fewer resolution agreements than during Trump’s first term in 2017.
- Reached zero resolution agreements in 15 states and Puerto Rico.
- Spent up to \$38 million by paying OCR employees held on administrative leave during pending litigation over the RIFs.

Rather than fulfill its congressional mandate, the administration has distorted civil rights laws and weaponized OCR to attack transgender students, student protestors, and programs that support diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”) in schools. From the information OCR has cherry-picked to share with the public, it has ignored its backlog of filed complaints to initiate its own politically-motivated directed investigations and rescissions.

Instead of addressing actual complaints of sex discrimination, including sexual violence, OCR has prioritized opening directed investigations under Title IX of schools with inclusive policies for transgender students and rescinding several existing Title IX resolution agreements that include the term “gender identity.” It has also directed Title VI investigations of schools with policies meant to create welcoming and safe learning environments for students who have historically been denied equal access to education because of their race and rescinded Title VI existing resolution agreements meant to curb the harms of disproportionate discipline, particularly for Black, brown, and Indigenous students. These actions further marginalize students who are already vulnerable to experiencing discrimination and harassment.

Education Week [has been tracking](#) and analyzing OCR investigations since the beginning of the second Trump administration using publicly available information from ED’s announcements and local news reports. As of May 20, 2026, according to that analysis, OCR opened at least 168 investigations—most of them initiated by OCR and without a complaint—focused on the Trump administration’s policy priorities. This includes at least 70 Title VI investigations for race-based programming to support underserved students, at least 60 Title IX investigations

focused on schools with trans inclusive policies (compared with only 2 opened investigations addressing sexual assault and 2 opened investigations regarding services for students with disabilities).

Other media reports provide further insight into OCR's enforcement (or lack thereof). For example, a [December 2025 ProPublica](#) report analyzes data that ProPublica obtained from ED that showed "more than 1,000 racial harassment investigations initiated in previous administrations [were] still open. Most of those complaints involve harassment of Black students." They also noted that since Trump took office in 2025, OCR has opened only "14 investigations into allegations of racial harassment of Black students," while, in that same time period, OCR received over 500 racial harassment complaints.

Advocacy organizations have shared about the chilling effect on students' and families' willingness to file complaints with OCR. An organization that represents student survivors reported that a medical school student, who was sexually harassed by her professor, was forced to retake—and pay additional tuition for—an entire year of classes instead of receiving support by her institution to continue in her education. Knowing that OCR failed to respond to several complaints previously filed against the school, she knew OCR was not reliable and did not file her own complaint, instead taking on thousands of dollars of additional student loan debt to complete her program.

### **Congress Should Act Now to Save OCR and Protect Students' Rights**

No administration should be allowed to flout Congressional will for political gain. Congress must act now to ensure OCR has the capacity and resources to meaningfully protect our nation's students and to ensure that educational progress is not eroded by insincere political motivations.

Here is what your office can do:

1. **Reject** President Trump's budget recommendations to slash OCR funding by 35%.
2. **Vote** to, at minimum, double the funding for OCR from the FY2025 enacted level, and staff OCR to meaningfully accomplish its duties.
3. **Advocate** for legislative text that will ensure funds appropriated for OCR are not used towards politically motivated investigations that attack (1) educational policies and programs that support diversity, equity, and inclusion of underserved students, including Black students, other students of color, women, girls, and students with disabilities; (2) students' and employees' constitutional freedoms, such as free speech protections; and (3) students, particularly students from marginalized communities, such as transgender and nonbinary students and immigrant students.

4. **Contact** Education Secretary Linda McMahon and Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Kimberly Richey and urge that OCR:
    - a. Reinstate closed OCR regional offices.
    - b. Hire more OCR investigators to provide timely protection to students.
    - c. Notify all complainants of their case status.
    - d. Begin reaching resolution agreements, where appropriate, in the discrimination categories where OCR has reached zero resolution agreements.
    - e. Cease the mass dismissal of complaints, and reinstate improperly dismissed cases.
    - f. Cease efforts to rescind existing resolution agreements, and reinstate improperly withdrawn resolution agreements.
    - g. Cease the weaponization of civil rights laws.
    - h. Release the overdue 2023-24 Civil Rights Data Collection.
    - i. Restore its public transparency.
    - j. Release its fiscal year 2025 annual report.
  5. **Speak** to your constituents about the harmful impact of a non-functioning OCR, and invite them to share with your office concerns about OCR's failure to enforce students' civil rights protections.
  6. **Monitor** and provide support to school districts in your District or State that are being targeted or underserved by the current OCR.
- 

### Additional Resources

- [Justice Denied: How Trump's Office for Civil Rights Reached a 12-Year Low in Protecting Students from Discrimination](#)
- [GAO: Full Costs and Savings Estimate Needed for Reduction-in-Force and Restructuring of the Office for Civil Rights](#)
- [FY 2024 OCR Report to Congress](#)
- [Department of Education FY 2027 Budget Request: Congressional Justification for Office for Civil Rights](#)
- [Letter from Sanders, 34 Senators Demanding McMahon Reverse Failed Policies, Protect Students from Discrimination and Harassment](#)
- [The State of Civil Rights for Students and Schools](#)
- [OCRWatch.org](#) (or scan the QR code below)

