

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2025

Secretary Linda McMahon
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

The staffing cuts to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the Department of Education and the closure of OCR hubs in Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Dallas, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, clearly compromise the Department's ability to fulfill its statutory civil rights mandate. We demand an immediate restoration of these staff and offices to fulfill the Department's congressionally directed responsibilities.¹

The Department of Education was established with the express purpose to strengthen the Federal commitment to ensuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual, as well as to increase the accountability of Federal education programs to the President, the Congress, and the public. The Office for Civil rights was explicitly established within the Department to ensure that all schools receiving federal funds abide by federal civil rights laws.²

The OCR, established by the Department of Education Organization Act in 1979, provides an invaluable service to students nationwide, protecting their equal access to education. OCR lawyers and staff are responsible for investigating complaints of discrimination brought by students, when they are discriminated against by schools based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age. They also develop regulations and policy guidance to support these protections and provide technical assistance to schools attempting to protect their students' rights.

OCR also administers the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), a biennial survey of early education and K-12 local education agencies and schools on enforcing civil rights protections in their districts. The data collected through the CRDC informs the investigation and enforcement work OCR conducts when it receives specific complaints from students and the regulations and guidance that the Department of Education promulgates. This data is critical to help the Department of Education and lawmakers understand trends in discrimination and school climate.³

No student should be unsafe in school and OCR is a key component of keeping our students safe.

OCR provides a crucial safeguard when state and local education agencies are unable or unwilling to protect their students, and robust funding for their work is more critical than ever. In 2023 OCR received over 19,000 individual complaints from students who alleged discriminatory treatment by their publicly funded schools.

¹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/education-department-civil-rights-division-eroded-by-massive-layoffs#:~:text=The%20Office%20for%20Civil%20Rights,City%2C%20Seattle%20and%20Washington%2C%20D.C.>

² <https://www.congress.gov/96/statute/STATUTE-93/STATUTE-93-Pg668.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Education. "About OCR." U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education, 24 May 2023, www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/aboutocr.html.

This broke the 2022 record and is more than double the number of complaints received in 2021.⁴ Eliminating staffing and closing the hubs flies in that face of the transparently increasing demand.

Despite the increasing number of complaints, OCR was already underfunded and understaffed and closing these regional offices will worsen the situation and further jeopardize the office's vital work. As of 2023, OCR had eighteen percent fewer staff than in 2016,⁵ and OCR was recently further diminished by the widespread layoffs that hit the Department in March 2025. While slashing the Department's workforce has impacted every aspect of the Department's role, OCR was particularly hard hit. At the time of these terminations, OCR had 550 employees, at least 243 of whom have reportedly been put on administrative leave or terminated.⁶ These terminations, and the shuttering of offices across the country, will make the Department less able to protect vulnerable students against harassment and civil rights violations.

After meeting with House Members who expressed concern with the unlawful dismantling of the Department of Education, you tweeted, "[our] collective goal should be to support students, not the broken bureaucracy."⁷ OCR's role is to do just that – guaranteeing students equal access to education, but firing these staff just contributes to broken bureaucracy. The legacy of Ruby Bridges demands that we have a successful and robustly staffed OCR.

To better understand the Trump Administration's plans regarding the Department of Education, please respond to the following questions:

1. Please describe in detail how the proposed OCR hub closures and staffing reductions will improve its authorized and funded activities, and how it will enhance the educational climate and well-being of students across the country.
2. What impact, if any, does the Administration estimate these closures and terminations will have on the number, type, depth, or length of investigations at the Office of Civil Rights? How did you arrive at these estimates?
3. How were the Office for Civil Rights offices in Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Dallas, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco chosen for closure? How did the Department assess the impact of these office closures on the work of the Office of Civil Rights prior to initiating these terminations?
4. Please provide a justification for whether or not these closures include any reprogramming or transfer of funds.
5. How will these office closures impact the process by which students, families, and teachers report allegations of civil rights violations in schools? How will any new processes be communicated to these groups?

We are deeply concerned that these actions are a de facto violation of the Department's legislative mandate, urge you to reemploy OCR staff and reopen essential OCR regional offices nationwide. We look forward to your prompt response.

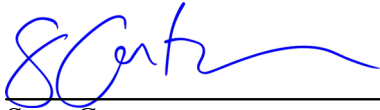
⁴ Modan, Naaz. "Federal Discrimination Complaints Continued Upswing in 2023 with No Signs of Slowing." *K-12 Dive, Industry Dive*, 22 Feb. 2024, www.k12dive.com/news/discrimination-complaints-increased-again-in-2023-no-signs-of-slowing-in-2/708187/#:~:text=down%20this%20year.-

⁵ Quilantan, Bianca. "'We Need a Strong OCR': Advocates Press for Civil Rights Funding." *Politico, Politico*, 20 June 2023, www.politico.com/newsletters/weekly-education/2023/06/20/we-need-a-strong-ocr-advocates-press-for-civil-rights-funding-00102618.

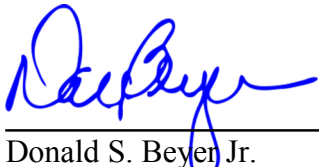
⁶ <https://www.propublica.org/article/education-department-civil-rights-division-eroded-by-massive-layoffs#:~:text=The%20Office%20for%20Civil%20Rights,City%2C%20Seattle%20and%20Washington%2C%20D.C>

⁷ <https://x.com/EDSecMcMahon/status/1907468431781409275>

Sincerely,



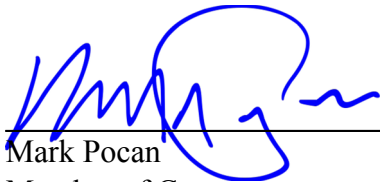
Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



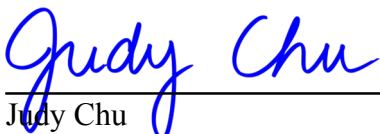
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



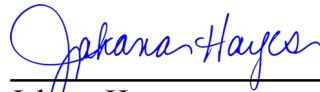
Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



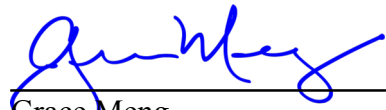
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



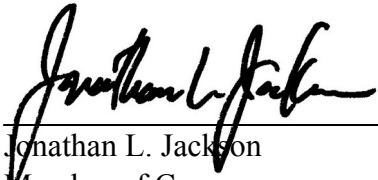
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



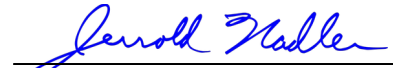
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



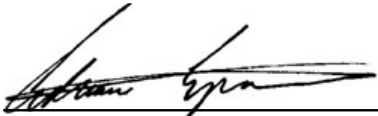
Grace Meng
Member of Congress



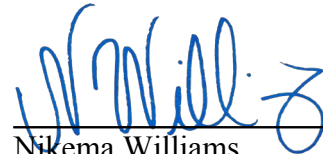
Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



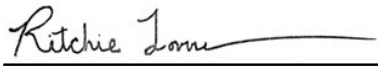
Terrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



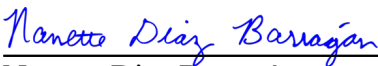
Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



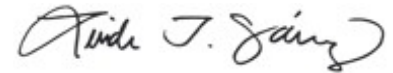
Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



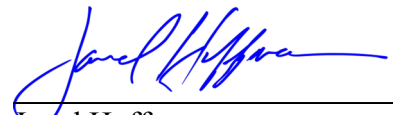
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



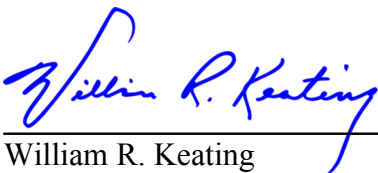
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



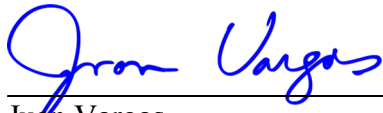
Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress



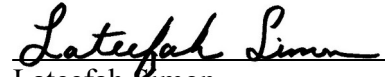
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



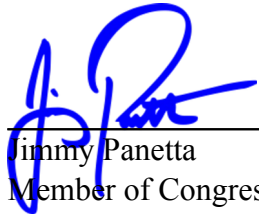
Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



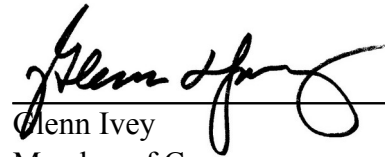
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress



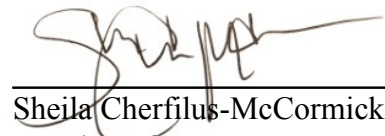
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress



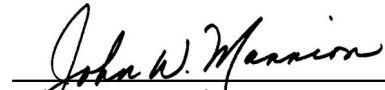
Seth Moulton
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Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
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Scott H. Peters
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John W. Mannion
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Raja Krishnamoorthi
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Delia C. Ramirez
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Laura Friedman
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Greg Landsman
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Yvette D. Clarke
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