

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2025

Secretary Linda McMahon
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

We write as representatives serving communities of students who, until March 11, 2025, were served by the Philadelphia Regional Office of the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR). We are deeply opposed to your decisions to shutter the Philadelphia office and six other regional offices, summarily fire nearly half of the workforce at the Department of Education (the Department) and then attempt to dismantle the Department without congressional authorization. We are especially concerned about how this decision leaves students in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Delaware without the civil rights protections that dedicated investigators in the Philadelphia office have enforced for decades.

We are further troubled by reports that indicate the Department is opening an unprecedented number of directed investigations, which instruct the few remaining OCR staff to prioritize the Trump Administration's politicized agenda instead of ensuring that students of all backgrounds are treated fairly and that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education. Of the handful of cases that OCR has opened in the new Administration, the majority are directed investigations initiated by the Department instead of responses to complaints filed by students or their families. While the Department appears to be self-selecting cases that fit the current Administration's political narrative, tens of thousands of actual pending complaints—spanning allegations of racial and sex-based discrimination, antisemitism, denial of services, and more—from parents and students remain in limbo.¹ These actions will only serve to delay an enormous caseload of more than 20,000 pending cases² as new complaints continue to pour in.

Under federal law, it is illegal for any program or activity receiving federal funding administered by the Department to discriminate against students on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age.³ Congress passed these laws more than a half-century ago

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/14/us/politics/education-department-civil-rights-office.html>

² <https://apnews.com/article/education-department-disability-civil-rights-complaint-218a04f50bcf21cb02175e8565a3a287>

³ Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act; the Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act; and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975.

and OCR's regional offices are the primary instruments for enforcing them. As one OCR attorney described it,

“Part of OCR’s work is to physically go to places. As part of the investigation, we go to schools, we look at the playground, we see if it’s accessible... We measure the bathroom to make sure it’s accessible. We interview student groups. It requires in-person work. That is part of the basis of having regional offices.”⁴

Because OCR’s services are a public good, to date parents or guardians seeking a free and appropriate education for their child have not had to hire an expensive law firm to see action. If they’ve been unable to make progress on accessibility concerns for their child or they believe the problem might be systemic, to date parents have been able to seek help from OCR and attention from attorneys at OCR’s regional offices.

In announcing the mass purge of approximately 260 of OCR’s 560 employees, your office asserted that the Department “will continue to deliver on all statutory programs that fall under the agency’s purview, including formula funding, student loans, Pell Grants, funding for special needs students, and competitive grantmaking.”⁵ A week later, you heralded President Trump’s March 20, 2025 Executive Order by asserting that the Department will “follow the law and eliminate the bureaucracy responsibly by working through Congress to ensure a lawful and orderly transition.”⁶

These are hollow promises, considering that you have simultaneously shuttered seven of OCR’s 12 regional offices, including the Philadelphia office that serves our constituents.⁷ Civil rights complaints, particularly cases involving students with disabilities, require extensive in-person investigative work and fact-finding. Asking half the workforce to process the same or a higher volume of complaints and eliminating the regional offices serving half the country will mean that students, especially students with disabilities, can no longer count on the federal government to enforce civil rights laws. The Department should instead be soliciting Congress for *more* resources to reflect the fact that civil rights complaints have nearly tripled in the past 15 years.⁸

Underlying each of our aforementioned concerns is the Department’s stunning lack of transparency. The Department failed to consult with Congress before gutting its workforce, and it provided Congress and the American people with no plan for how civil rights cases will be addressed in time to provide real protections to students across the country.

⁴ <https://www.propublica.org/article/education-department-civil-rights-division-eroded-by-massive-layoffs>

⁵ <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-initiates-reduction-force>

⁶ <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/statement-president-trumps-executive-order-return-power-over-education-states-and-local-communities>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/13/us/politics/trump-education-department-civil-rights.html>

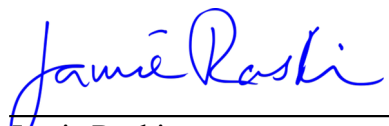
⁸ <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/ocr-report-president-and-secretary-of-education-2024-109012.pdf>

To that end, we ask that you respond to each of the following information requests in writing by no later than April 4, 2025:

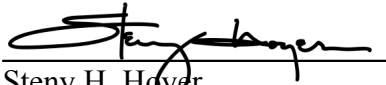
1. The number of cases OCR has opened since January 20, 2025, and a summary of each including the subject of the complaint, the type of alleged discrimination, the institution under investigation, and the date OCR opened the investigation;
2. A detailed explanation of why the Department has not updated its public list of elementary-secondary and post-secondary institutions currently under investigation since January 14, 2025;
3. Current staffing levels within OCR and at each of OCR's 12 regional offices, including a description of staff reductions or reallocations that have taken place since January 20, 2025;
4. A list of all employees terminated between January 20, 2025 and March 27, 2025, including their titles and job descriptions;
5. A detailed explanation of how the Department arrived at a list of OCR employees to be terminated, including the applicable legal authority for such terminations without appropriate notice;
6. Details, if they exist, on how the Department planned to seamlessly transfer pending civil rights cases to OCR's remaining employees before dismissing 260 employees;
7. The average number of cases currently assigned to each OCR employee;
8. What new guidance and best practices OCR plans to disseminate to employees investigating complaints, especially as eliminating regional offices will restrict their ability to travel for investigatory purposes; and
9. A detailed plan outlining how the Department intends to continue enforcing civil rights laws for all students across the country.

Congress passed the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1972 guaranteeing every student access to an equal education. This legislation was later adopted in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We believe that the 50 million elementary and secondary school students and 20 million college students in America today deserve to attend their classes without fear of discrimination, regardless of which state they call home.

Very truly yours,



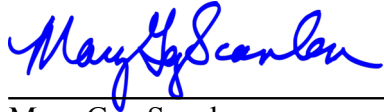
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



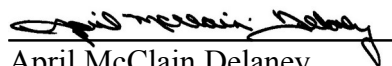
Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



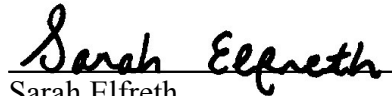
Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress



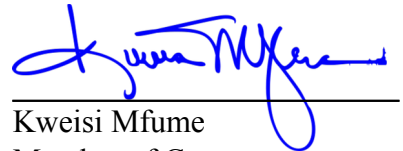
April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress



Sarah McBride
Member of Congress



Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



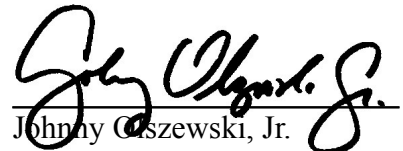
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



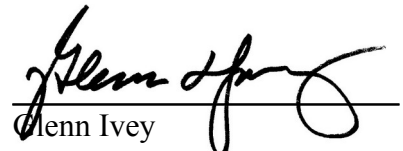
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Johnny Ciszewski, Jr.
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress

Morgan McGarvey

Morgan McGarvey
Member of Congress