

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2025

The Honorable Tim Walberg
Chairman
House Committee on Education and Workforce
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chair Walberg and Chair Comer,

We write to express our serious concerns that the Trump Administration's overreaching executive power is contravening the rights of federal employees at the Department of Education (ED) and already dismantling ED by severing it from its critical work protected under federal law.

DOGE's Unchecked Power at the Department of Education

Our concerns begin with the alleged infiltration of outside entities, such as private debt collector "Conserve Arms," and unauthorized HHS email signatures appearing on ED servers early into the Trump Administration. ED protects student data, enforces security protocols, and follows congressional mandates. Reports indicate that these internal systems—designed to be secure—are instead being accessed by individuals with no lawful authority to do so.¹ This interference threatens ED's security and raises serious concerns about whether confidential information is being accessed, manipulated, or weaponized for personal or political purposes.

Beyond these alarming breaches, we received credible reports that DOGE staffers had taken residence on the 7th floor of the Lyndon B. Johnson Department of Education Building—an unprecedented and deeply troubling development. These individuals were observed interfering with ED's IT infrastructure, violating the privacy rights of federal employees, and accessing personally identifiable information from student loan records at the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA).² Contractors and career employees have raised red flags about unauthorized data access, yet their warnings were ignored, leaving critical student information vulnerable to misuse.

DOGE representatives had gained access to sensitive financial data within the ED, injecting confidential records into an AI system without any oversight.³ Many of these individuals were reportedly given security clearances without proper vetting. Yet, they were combing through contracts, grants, and agency budgets with the alleged goal of cutting funding and staffing.⁴ This left many questioning how such access had been granted and whether any safeguards were in place, yet senior officials at ED have allegedly provided zero guidance on this.

¹ "Musk team's access to student loan systems raises alarm over borrowers' personal information," February 7, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/education-department-trump-doge-8c5bba3883b3d924b28114a4f291bec4>.

² Inside Higher Ed, "DOGE's Access to Education Department Data Raises Concerns," February 8, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/02/08/doges-access-education-department-data-raises>.

³ New America, Defending the Department of Education, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/collections/defending-the-department-of-education/>.

⁴ Federal News Network, "DOGE's Unimpeded Access to Classified Data Poses National, Economic Security Risks," February 2025, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/management/2025/02/doges-unimpeded-access-to-classified-data-poses-national-economic-security-risks/>.

Further, internal documents reveal DOGE is executing a three-phase plan, with the final stage—set to last until mid-July—focused on mass firings, even in offices required by law.⁵ What started as a purge of DEI has spiraled into a sweeping effort to slash staff in critical agencies, regardless of their actual roles, undermining the very institutions meant to serve the public.

One particularly troubling case was the abrupt placement of FSA employees on administrative leave—an office that does not fall under DEI initiatives in any capacity.⁶ These removals were not isolated incidents. To date, hundreds of ED employees remain on administrative leave, including civil rights attorneys, loan service officers, and IT personnel—many of whom had no direct involvement with DEI programming.

Retaliation Against Employees and Questionable Tactics

It's important to note that DEI-related committees within the agency weren't just tolerated—they had been actively encouraged under the first Trump administration. Employees who participated in these efforts had done so under policies that were, at the time, not only accepted but promoted by Department leadership.⁷ Now, those same employees are facing retaliation for their involvement, which disregards both past precedent and basic fairness. This abrupt reversal not only undermines the Department's credibility but signals to career employees that their jobs are subject to political whims, no matter how faithfully they followed prior directives.

It is our understanding that on January 21st, ED's then highest-level appointee communicated to employees that "everything related to DEI will be stripped," issuing an order with little notice in response to President Trump's executive order targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Since then, waves of federal employees have been abruptly stripped of their access to ED servers and placed on administrative leave. On February 24th, a federal court ordered a pause on President Trump's executive orders targeting DEI.⁸ Despite this ruling, the White House has taken little visible corrective action, allowing DOGE to continue placing employees under administrative leave.

On January 28, federal employees received an email offering what was described as a "deferred resignation" option, promising that those who accepted could continue receiving "free" pay until September. To proceed, employees were instructed to simply reply to the email with the word "resign" to learn more about the buyout terms. This practice was deeply concerning. Employees were expected to agree to resignation before being provided with any details on the supposed buyout offer—raising serious legal and ethical red flags.

On February 7, members of Congress attempted to raise these issues with Acting Secretary Denise Carter and were denied entry to the ED building, while DOGE staffers were given free rein to enter and use the premises as sleeping quarters. This raises a critical question—why were unaccountable outside actors granted full access while elected officials responsible for oversight were being turned away?

Workforce Violations and Federal Employee Rights

The actions taken by DOGE at ED extend beyond IT breaches and data misuse- they directly violate the rights of federal employees and break their collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

⁵ The Washington Post, "Trump administration plans to fire federal employees in DEI roles," February 15, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/02/15/doge-fire-federal-employees-trump-dei/>

⁶ CNN, "Education Department Employees Targeted in DEI Purge," February 2, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/02/politics/education-department-employees-dei-purge/index.html>.

⁷ NBC News, "Union official says Education Department employees placed on leave for attending DEI training," February 8, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/union-official-education-department-employees-leave-dei-training-rcna190337>.

⁸ Forbes, "Judge Blocks Parts of Trump's Executive Orders Targeting DEI," Forbes, February 22, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2025/02/22/judge-blocks-parts-of-trumps-executive-orders-targeting-dei/>.

On February 12th, the Department of Education abruptly terminated at least 60 employees across the country, including staff from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). At a time when federal oversight in special education and rehabilitative services is more essential than ever, these unexplained firings signal a disturbing willingness to undermine critical programs under the pretense of eliminating diversity initiatives. Even more concerning, some of the terminated employees have already accepted the deferred resignation offer and were still dismissed—among them, a disabled veteran.

Following President Trump’s “Return to In-Person Work” executive order, employees were abruptly ordered back to the office before the agency negotiated these working conditions changes as expressly enumerated in AFGE Local 252’s CBA.⁹ Many employees were first hired during COVID or after the CBA was negotiated and have never reported to an office. This has left many questioning whether they should seek out their own offices, relocate, or if there is even enough office space available, yet no guidance has been provided by OPM or senior officials.

What’s more troubling is that employees are being forced to relocate without any financial support. There has been no consideration for relocation assistance, and transit benefits have yet to be issued or even discussed. It is clear that this plan was put into motion without fully considering the consequences for employees or ED’s operations.

As members of Congress, you have a duty to act. We urge the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to investigate DOGE’s overreach, mass firings, and violations of federal workforce protections—which goes beyond the ED and threatens the entire federal workforce.

We also urge the House Committee on Education & Workforce to confront ED’s security breaches, staff terminations, and the fallout for students, families, and schools. ED cannot function under these conditions.

ED’s ability to function effectively is at stake, and failure to act will have lasting repercussions for your constituents, millions of students, families, educators, educational support staff, and education professionals who rely on its oversight.

Sincerely,



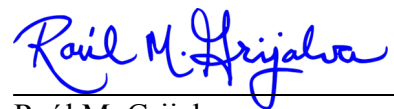
Alma S. Adams
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Subcommittee
on Higher Education and
Workforce Development



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

⁹ American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 252, “Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) Term Agreement,” January 16, 2025, <https://afge252ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/cba-term-agreement-20250116.pdf>.



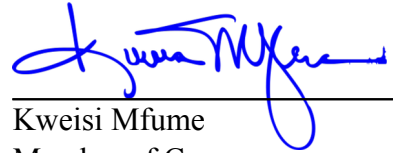
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



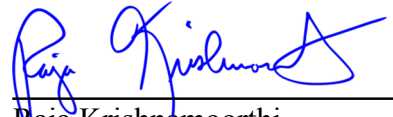
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress




Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress




Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



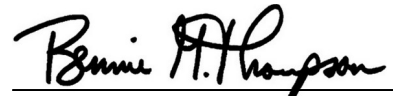
Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



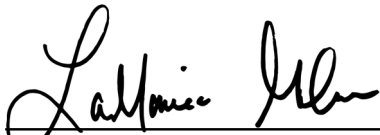
Darren Soto
Member of Congress



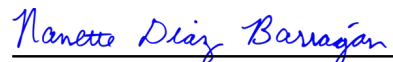
Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



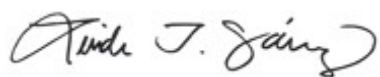
Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



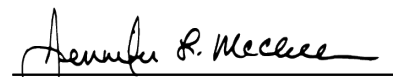
LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



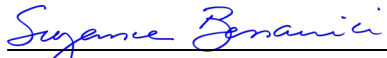
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



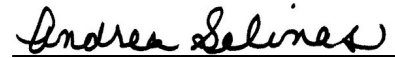
Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



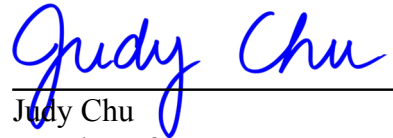
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



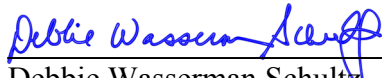
Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



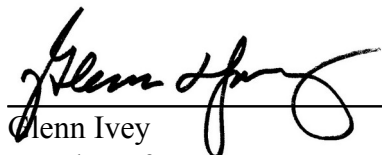
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



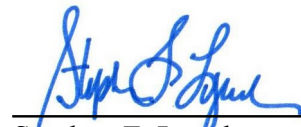
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



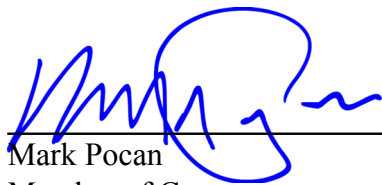
Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



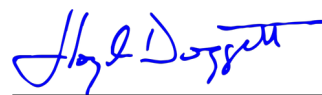
Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress