

Federal Agencies Target Universities Amid Antisemitism Allegations

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The federal government recently revoked all grants and contracts with Columbia University, citing “illegal protests” and antisemitism on campus. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights also sent letters to sixty universities, warning them of potential enforcement actions if they do not sufficiently protect Jewish students from harassment and discrimination.

Quick Hits

- The Trump administration recently withdrew all contracts and grants with Columbia University in response to the anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian protests and allegations of harassment against Jewish students that occurred there in 2024.
- The Department of Education sent letters to alert sixty other universities that they could face enforcement actions if they fail to protect Jewish students from harassment and discrimination.
- The federal government has a new Joint Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism.

On March 7, 2025, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) announced they were canceling \$400 million worth of federal grants and contracts with Columbia University in New York City. The agencies, as part of the new Joint Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism, cited “illegal protests” and “the school’s continued inaction in the face of persistent harassment of Jewish students.”

The Trump administration and its Joint Task Force to Combat Antisemitism are targeting colleges that have seen pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel protests on their campuses, protests that the administration is interpreting to be antisemitic and ‘illegal’ according to the recent letters and the prior EO.”

Many universities, including Columbia, experienced protests by students and staff in 2023 and 2024, following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack against Israel and the subsequent ongoing war between Israel and Hamas.

On January 29, 2025, President Donald Trump released an [executive order](#) titled “Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism.” The order directed federal agencies to report on complaints “against or involving institutions of higher education alleging civil-rights violations related to or arising from post-October 7, 2023, campus anti-Semitism.” It ordered agencies to identify all civil and criminal authorities or actions within their jurisdiction that might be used to curb antisemitism.

On March 3, 2025, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued a [statement](#) indicating a new policy priority to combat antisemitism in higher education. EEOC Acting Chair Andrea Lucas said, “[U]niversities are workplaces, too, and large-scale employers. In addition to Jewish professors on campus, universities employ Jewish staff who work a variety of jobs, all of whom have the right not to be discriminated against or harassed on the basis of religion, national origin, or race.”

On March 10, the Department of Education sent letters to sixty universities across the country, warning of potential enforcement actions if they don’t protect Jewish students from harassment and discrimination.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits workplace harassment and discrimination based on religion and national origin, which includes having Jewish ancestry.

Federal Law on Protests

Under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, individuals have the right to peacefully protest in public spaces. Protesting violates the law if it becomes violent, incites immediate violence, or lacks a permit required for the space.

In 2024, although many protesters were peaceful, some campus protests led to violence and property damage, which resulted in arrests.

Next Steps

Universities and colleges may wish to inventory all federal contracts and grants they currently have to better understand their scope. They may wish to carefully document their policies and practices intended to prevent harassment and discrimination based on religion and national origin. They can update their employee handbooks and employee training to specifically prohibit anti-Jewish harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

The EEOC has released a [poster](#) that explains workers’ rights if they experience antisemitism at work.

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