

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE  
DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS**

VICTIM RIGHTS LAW CENTER; A.J., by and through his parent, KAREN JOSEFOSKY; KAREN JOSEFOSKY; TARA BLUNT; AMY COOK; and T.R., by and through his parent, TARA BLUNT, and M.C., by and through her parent, AMY COOK, on behalf of themselves and all others similarly situated.

*Plaintiffs,*

V.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF )  
EDUCATION; LINDA MCMAHON, in her official )  
capacity as Secretary of Education; and )  
KIMBERLY RICHEY, in her official capacity as )  
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, )

*Defendants.*

Case No. 1:25-cv-11042

**AMENDED CLASS ACTION  
COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY  
AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

1. This case concerns an issue that should be uncontroversial: whether the administrative system that Congress established to protect children who are victims of discrimination should provide a meaningful path to relief. In March 2025, Defendants gutted that system almost overnight, leaving a hollowed-out organization incapable of performing its statutorily mandated functions. Without judicial intervention, the system will exist in name only for children who have suffered most types of discrimination.

2. Congress created the United States Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (“OCR”) to enforce landmark federal civil rights laws that ban discrimination based on

<sup>1</sup> Plaintiffs are filing this amended complaint with Defendants' written consent pursuant to Rule 15(a)(2) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

race, sex, and disability in schools that receive federal funds: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Federal regulations require OCR to promptly investigate complaints that indicate a “possible failure to comply” with those laws.

3. For over forty years, American students who face discrimination or harassment at school have looked to OCR to protect their civil rights. Some face exclusion from school activities because of their race or sex. Some endure sexual harassment, sexual assault, or race-based violence while their schools fail to act. Still others struggle to learn on an equal basis with their peers because their schools will not provide basic accommodations for their disabilities. These students seek OCR’s help because their local school systems have engaged in discrimination or allowed it to continue. As a result, many of them have nowhere else to turn.

4. Defendants’ actions have closed that path to relief to thousands of students. Shortly after the new administration took office on January 20, 2025, the Department of Education (the “Department”) froze all investigations into complaints of race and sex discrimination filed by members of the public. Although Education Secretary Linda McMahon purported to lift that pause on March 6, 2025, Defendants have largely continued it in practice. Secretary McMahon has announced that the Department’s “Final Mission” is to dismantle itself entirely. On March 11, 2025, as part of that ongoing effort, the Department’s reduction in force (“RIF”) cut OCR’s staff in half and shuttered seven of its twelve regional offices. The RIF terminated more than 200 OCR investigators, reducing the agency’s workforce to the lowest level in its history.

5. This Court preliminary enjoined the March RIF in June 2025, but the First Circuit later stayed that injunction based on Supreme Court caselaw governing interim relief. So in October 2025, the Department reinitiated the RIF, telling the affected employees that they would

be terminated effective November 3, 2025. Around the same time, on October 10, 2025, the Department initiated an additional RIF that would have eliminated 137 more employees. On October 28, 2025, in a case brought by government employee unions, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California issued a preliminary injunction that blocked both RIFs.<sup>2</sup>

6. Weeks later, Congress passed a law that invalidated both RIFs. *See Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026, Pub. L. No. 119-37, 119th Cong. (Nov. 12, 2025)* (the “Continuing Appropriations Act”). The Continuing Appropriations Act cancelled any RIF “proposed, noticed, initiated, executed, implemented, or otherwise taken” from October 1 to November 12, 2025. *Id.* § 120(e). Because the March RIF was re-initiated, executed, and implemented in October 2025, the Act provides that both the March RIF and the October 10 RIF “have no force and effect.” *Id.*

7. Although the Department has rescinded the second, October 10 RIF, it contends that Section 120(e) of the Continuing Appropriations Act does not apply to the March RIF. In an implicit acknowledgement that OCR needs the affected employees to fulfill its mandates, on December 5, 2025, the Department ordered the employees covered by the March RIF to return to work while litigation continues. But the Department has made clear that it intends to proceed with the March RIF as soon as it can do so without violating a court order.

8. If the Department proceeds with the March RIF, the mass termination will make it impossible for OCR to comply with its statutory and regulatory obligations. With less than half its workforce, OCR has had the capacity to address only a small fraction of the complaints it receives. While Defendants have selectively launched a series of high-profile investigations into select

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<sup>2</sup> *Am. Fed. of State Cnty. and Municipal Emps. v. U.S. Office of Management and Budget*, No. 3:25-cv-08302-SI, Dkt. No. 94 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 28, 2025).

issues, including investigations into diversity, equity, and inclusion programs that Defendants allege discriminate against white and Asian students, Defendants' actions have effectively frozen almost all other investigations. Due to the RIFs, complaints that allege race discrimination against students of color, most sex discrimination against women and girls, and disability discrimination will continue to stagnate absent judicial action.

9. Defendants' actions violate the Administrative Procedure Act ("APA"), the Department of Education Organization Act, the Continuing Appropriations Act, and OCR's statutory and regulatory mandates under the civil rights laws. They would leave students across the country to face discrimination and hostile learning environments without recourse.

10. Plaintiffs seek class certification and declaratory and injunctive relief to hold unlawful and set aside Defendants' illegal actions. Vacating the RIFs and restoring OCR's enforcement capacity will allow prompt investigation, resolution, and enforcement in Plaintiffs' and class members' pending OCR matters, as required under federal law.

### **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

11. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 because this action arises under federal law. Jurisdiction is also proper under the judicial review provisions of the APA. 5 U.S.C. §§ 702, 704. An actual controversy exists between the parties within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 2201(a), and this Court may grant declaratory, injunctive, and other appropriate relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201–2202 and 5 U.S.C. §§ 705–706.

12. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b)(2) and (e)(1) because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims asserted herein occurred in this district, Plaintiff Victim Rights Law Center resides in this district, and Defendants are United States agencies or officers acting in their official capacities.

## **PARTIES**

13. Plaintiff Victim Rights Law Center (“VRLC”) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the legal needs of victims of sex-based harassment, including survivors of sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking in school. VRLC’s mission is to ensure that victims have adequate legal representation needed to help rebuild their lives and to promote a national movement committed to seeking justice for every victim. As part of that mission, VRLC’s attorneys represent student survivors of sexual harassment, including sexual assault, in OCR investigations. It also counsels advocates nationwide about the legal options available for such students. Defendants’ actions have frustrated VRLC’s core activities and forced it to divert resources to counseling clients and attorneys about the implications of the RIF and office closures for the OCR process and about alternative, often inadequate remedies under state and federal law.

14. Plaintiff T.R. (a proposed class representative) is a twelve-year-old Black child. Plaintiff Tara Blunt is T.R.’s mother. From 2022 to 2023, T.R. attended a public elementary school in a Falls City, Nebraska. There, T.R. experienced persistent race-based harassment by a group of other students. He and his mother reported the racial harassment to school officials, who failed to adequately respond and instead retaliated against T.R. for reporting. From there, the harassment only worsened, forcing Ms. Blunt to withdraw T.R. from public school. In December 2023, OCR opened an investigation into whether the school’s response to the harassment and the alleged retaliation violated Title VI. But, on information and belief, OCR stopped processing Ms. Blunt and T.R.’s complaint during the pause, and the RIF will make it impossible for OCR to timely resolve the investigation so that T.R. can return to public school.

15. Plaintiff A.J. is a ten-year-old child with life-threatening allergies. Plaintiff Karen Josefosky is A.J.’s mother. A.J.’s allergies are so severe that they interfere with major life activities

and thereby constitute a legal disability. From 2023 through 2024, A.J. attended third grade at a public school in Birmingham, Michigan. He was repeatedly and severely harassed for his allergies throughout the school year. After a particularly traumatic event in which other students surrounded A.J. with allergens, taunted him, and pushed him to the ground, Ms. Josefosky withdrew A.J. from public school. Following the filing of a complaint, OCR opened an investigation into whether the school failed to respond to the disability-based harassment A.J. suffered. Facing an investigation, the school agreed to an OCR-facilitated mediation. But OCR stopped processing Ms. Josefosky's complaint during the pause, the OCR mediation did not go forward. Upon information and belief, OCR stopped investigating the complaint, and the RIF has made it impossible for OCR to promptly resolve the investigation in a manner that addresses the discrimination.

16. Plaintiff M.C. (a proposed class representative) is a ten-year-old girl. Plaintiff Amy Cook is M.C.'s mother. M.C. attended elementary school at a public school in Kalamazoo, Michigan. During the 2023-2024 school year, she was sexually assaulted and repeatedly sexually harassed by a classmate. Ms. Cook reported the harassment to the school principal and the district superintendent, but the school did not take adequate steps to respond, and the harassment continued. As a result, Ms. Cook moved M.C. to another public school in the same district. There, however, M.C. experienced more harassment and retaliation—this time by a teacher—and Ms. Cook ultimately withdrew M.C. from public school. She filed an OCR complaint in or around May 2024. The complaint was nearing resolution just before the new presidential administration took office. Since the RIF, M.C.'s OCR investigation has remained stalled as well.

17. Plaintiffs T.R. and M.C. seek to represent a class of thousands of other people across the country who are harmed by Defendants' unlawful actions.

18. Defendant the United States Department of Education is a cabinet agency within the executive branch of the United States government. Congress created the Department and defined its responsibilities by statute. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 3411.

19. Defendant Linda McMahon is the former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment and is now the United States Secretary of Education and the Department’s highest ranking official. She is charged with the supervision and management of all decisions and actions of the agency. 20 U.S.C. § 3412. She is sued in her official capacity.

20. Defendant Kimberly Richey is the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. She is the head of the OCR, an office that Congress created within the Department. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 3413. She is sued in her official capacity.

## LEGAL BACKGROUND

### **I. Federal law requires OCR to promptly investigate and resolve civil rights violations by educational institutions that receive federal funds.**

21. Congress established the U.S. Department of Education in 1979. *See* Department of Education Organization Act, Pub. L. No. 96–88, 93 Stat. 669 (1979) (codified as amended at 20 U.S.C. §§ 3401–510). It did so in part to meet the “continuing need to ensure equal access for all Americans to educational opportunities of a high quality” and to ensure that “such educational opportunities should not be denied because of race, creed, color, national origin, or sex.” *Id.* § 101.

22. To ensure “access by every individual to equal educational opportunities,” Congress created the Department’s Office for Civil Rights, which Congress tasked with the “responsibility for effectively carrying out the nation’s civil rights laws in education.” S. Rep. No. 96-49, at 35 (Mar. 27, 1979); *see* 20 U.S.C. § 3413(a).

23. Congress vested the authority to administer OCR not in the Secretary of Education, but in an Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. The Assistant Secretary must be appointed by the

President and confirmed by the Senate, 20 U.S.C. § 3412, must administer all functions transferred to OCR (other than “administrative and support functions”), and may “select, appoint, and employ such officers and employees, including staff attorneys, as may be necessary to carry out the functions of such Office,” 20 U.S.C. § 3413(a). The Secretary lacks the authority to “consolidate, alter, or discontinue” OCR, among other Department components. 20 U.S.C. § 3473(a)(1).

24. Congress charged OCR with enforcing federal statutes that prohibit race, sex, and disability-based discrimination under education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. These include: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans race discrimination, including race-based harassment, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d *et seq.*; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which bans sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 *et seq.*; and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which bans disability discrimination, 29 U.S.C. § 794. OCR also has the responsibility to enforce Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“Title II”), which bans disability discrimination by public entities, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131, *et seq.*, with respect to public schools. 28 C.F.R. § 35.190(b)(2).

25. Title VI and Title IX each expressly direct the Department to enforce their anti-discrimination mandates. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000d-1 (“Each Federal department and agency which is empowered to extend Federal financial assistance to any program or activity by way of grant, loan, or contract . . . is . . . directed to effectuate the provisions of [Title VI] with respect to such program or activity . . . .”); 20 U.S.C. § 1682 (“Each Federal department and agency which is empowered to extend Federal financial assistance to any education program or activity, by way of grant, loan, or contract . . . is . . . directed to effectuate the provisions of [Title IX] with respect to such program or activity . . . .”).



26. Federal regulations require OCR to investigate and resolve potential violations of Title VI, Section 504, Title IX, and Title II. *See* 34 C.F.R. Parts 100, 104, & 106; 28 C.F.R. Part 35. “[T]he regulations implementing Title VI . . . require OCR to investigate complaints that are filed with the agency . . .” Off. for Civ. Rts., U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *OCR Case Processing Manual* 21 (Feb. 19, 2025), <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocrcpm.pdf> (“Case Processing Manual”). Specifically, they require “[t]he responsible Department official or his designee” to “make a prompt investigation whenever a compliance review, report, complaint, or any other information indicates a possible failure to comply” with the regulations implementing Title VI, which prohibit discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities that receive federal funds. 34 C.F.R. § 100.7(c). In addition, “the regulations require OCR to initiate ‘periodic compliance reviews’ to assess the practices of recipients to determine whether they comply with the Title VI regulations.” Case Processing Manual 21; *see* 34 C.F.R. § 100.7(a). These requirements are incorporated by reference in the regulations implementing Title IX and Section 504. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 104.61; 34 C.F.R. § 106.81; *see also* Case Processing Manual at 21. The regulations implementing Title II also require OCR to investigate Title II complaints for which it is responsible. *See* 28 C.F.R. § 35.171; *see also* Case Processing Manual 7 n.3.

27. OCR’s Case Processing Manual provides procedures OCR must follow “to promptly and effectively investigate and resolve complaints, compliance reviews and directed investigations to ensure compliance with the civil rights laws and regulations enforced by OCR.” Case Processing Manual 2. It requires OCR to ensure that “the actions it[] takes in investigations are legally sufficient, supported by evidence, and dispositive of the allegations.” *Id.* at 15.

28. When OCR resolves a case through a voluntary resolution agreement, it must ensure the agreement is tied to both the allegations and the evidence obtained during the

investigation and that the resolution comports with applicable regulations. After OCR enters a resolution agreement, it must monitor the recipient to ensure it complies with the agreement. *See id.* at 22.

29. Once OCR concludes its investigation, it must issue a letter of finding as to whether the evidence establishes a violation. In case of a violation, OCR must attempt to negotiate a resolution agreement that “must include actions [or] steps that, when implemented, will remedy both the individual discrimination at issue and any similar instances where future violative conduct may recur.” *Id.* at 17. The manual sets strict deadlines for the completion of negotiations after OCR shares a proposed resolution agreement or issues a finding of noncompliance. *See id.* at 16, 18-19.

30. When OCR finds a violation but is unable to negotiate a resolution agreement within the specified timeframe, OCR must initiate enforcement action. Specifically, it must either: (1) initiate administrative proceedings to suspend, terminate, or refuse to grant or continue and defer financial assistance from the Department to the recipient; or (2) refer the case to the Department of Justice for judicial proceedings. Case Processing Manual at 23.

31. Beyond investigations and enforcement actions, OCR must provide technical assistance to help institutions comply with the civil rights laws to help avoid violations in the first place. Federal regulations require OCR to “provide assistance and guidance to recipients to help them comply voluntarily” with their regulatory obligations. 34 C.F.R. §§ 100.6(a); *see also id.* § 100.12(b) (requiring OCR to “issue and promptly make available to interested persons forms and detailed instructions and procedures for effectuating this part”). For example, OCR provides guidance documents, FAQs, pre-recorded webinars and webcasts, resources for drafting policies

that comply with civil rights statutes, and many other resources.<sup>3</sup> In the past, students, families, schools, and advocates like VRLC could contact OCR’s attorneys for support, such as interpretative guidance regarding the application of civil rights laws and regulations to particular situations. This helped students advocate for themselves, helped VRLC advocate for its clients, and helped schools achieve compliance without the need for formal legal action.

## **II. OCR plays a vital role in the enforcement of civil rights laws in school.**

32. As these statutory and regulatory mandates reflect, vigorous enforcement by OCR is vital to implementing the landmark legislation Congress charged OCR to enforce. A functional OCR is an essential bulwark against unlawful discrimination in the American education system.

33. In some circumstances, students may file lawsuits against educational institutions that violate their rights under Title VI, Title IX, or Section 504. But a lawsuit is not a viable option for many students who face discrimination and must contend with its effects.

34. First, to file a lawsuit, most students must hire a lawyer. The demands of modern litigation, including pleading requirements, discovery, and trial, require an attorney to navigate effectively. But many students cannot afford to pay an attorney to conduct litigation on an hourly basis. And because, in light of a 2022 Supreme Court decision, students can no longer obtain damages for emotional distress under Title VI, Title IX, or Section 504, it is often difficult—and sometimes impossible—for students to find an attorney willing to take their case on a contingency basis. Even when students are lucky enough to find an attorney who will litigate their case, litigation is still costly: they must typically pay one third of any money recovered in attorneys’ fees, in addition to the expenses of litigation—which can amount to tens or even hundreds of

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<sup>3</sup> Off. for Civ. Rts., U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *Civil Rights Tutorials and Technical Assistance*, <https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-offices/ocr/civil-rights-tutorials-and-technical-assistance> (last visited Apr. 17, 2025).

thousands of dollars—at the end of the case. In contrast, the OCR process is designed so that students can file complaints and obtain relief without an attorney, as OCR itself conducts the investigation and, when appropriate, negotiates a resolution with the school without the need for students to conduct discovery, brief motions, or handle a trial.

35. Second, because private lawsuits require intentional discrimination, but administrative enforcement by OCR does not, many students have claims that would support an OCR investigation (and potential enforcement action) that they could not assert in a private lawsuit. Thus, by making it impossible for OCR to perform its functions, Defendants have precluded entire categories of legal claims—not just a choice of forum. For example, although OCR may investigate claims of disparate impact under Title VI—that is, a claim based on a school policy that does not intentionally discriminate but has an unjustified disparate impact based on race—students may not assert such claims in a private lawsuit, which requires intentional discrimination. *See Alexander v. Sandoval*, 532 U.S. 275, 285 (2001).

36. Similarly, a student can file a lawsuit based on race-based harassment only if: (1) the harassment was both “severe” and “pervasive,” (2) a school official with authority to take corrective action had “actual” knowledge of the harassment, and (3) the school showed “deliberate indifference” to it. *See Davis ex rel. LaShonda D. v. Monroe Cnty. Bd. of Educ.*, 526 U.S. 629, 643, 650 (1999); *Kestenbaum v. President & Fellows of Harvard Coll.*, 743 F. Supp. 3d 297, 308 & n.8 (D. Mass. 2024) (explaining that “*Davis*’s deliberate indifference test applies in the Title VI context,” per every circuit to address the issue). Even where these elements are present, gathering evidence through discovery to make the requisite showing in a civil litigation is often an unsurmountable burden. In contrast, OCR may find that a school has violated Title VI because (1) a student experienced “severe, pervasive *or* persistent” race-based harassment, (2) a

school employee had “constructive” notice (that is, *should* have known) of the harassment, and (3) the school failed to take “reasonable steps to eliminate” the hostile environment. *See* Racial Incidents and Harassment Against Students at Educational Institutions; Investigative Guidance, 59 Fed. Reg. 11448, 11449-50 (Mar. 10, 1994); *accord* Off. for Civ. Rts., U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *Dear Colleague Letter: Protecting Students from Discrimination, such as Harassment, Based on Race, Color, or National Origin, Including Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics* 4-5 (May 7, 2024).

37. The same is true for Section 504 and Title II harassment claims. In a private lawsuit, a student alleging disability-based harassment must meet an adaptation of the *Davis* standard—they must show they faced severe and pervasive harassment based on their disability to which the school showed “deliberate indifference.” *See Thomas v. Springfield Sch. Comm.*, 59 F. Supp. 3d 294, 305 (D. Mass. 2014). In contrast, “OCR would find a disability-based harassment violation under Section 504 and Title II when: (1) a student is bullied based on a disability; (2) the bullying is sufficiently serious to create a hostile environment; (3) school officials know *or should know* about the bullying; and (4) the school does not respond appropriately,” i.e., if it failed to “take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the bullying, eliminate the hostile environment, prevent it from recurring, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects.” Off. of Civ. Rts., U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *Dear Colleague Letter: Responding to Bullying of Students with Disabilities* 4 (Oct. 21, 2014) (emphasis added).

38. Although Department of Education’s operative Title IX regulations require more for complaints of sexual harassment, the administrative standards for such claims are still less stringent than the high bar for private lawsuits under *Davis*. For example, OCR may find that an elementary or secondary school had “actual” notice of sexual harassment if “any employee” knew about it, even if that employee did not have “authority to redress the harassment” themselves.

Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance, 85 Fed. Reg. 30026, 30038-39 (May 19, 2020). In addition, single instances of “sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking” all meet the definition of “sexual harassment” for OCR’s purposes even when they do not “meet the *Davis* elements of severity, pervasiveness, and objective offensiveness.” *Id.* at 30036.

39. Third, OCR has often obtained systemic relief—including changes to school policies, procedures, and practices—that benefit not only the individual complainant, but also other current and future students at the school. Such remedies help prevent future violations. In contrast, plaintiffs in private lawsuits often cannot obtain systemic relief. Moreover, when OCR reaches a resolution agreement, it will monitor compliance with that agreement on its own, which individual students often lack the power, time, or resources to do.

40. OCR also offers other assistance to help resolve potential violations. For instance, OCR offers two mediation options to which the parties may voluntarily agree. Case Processing Manual at 13. If both parties agree to enter mediation, a trained OCR staff member helps the parties try to reach a mutually acceptable resolution to the complaint. *Id.* at 13-14. In contrast to private mediation, OCR provides mediation without cost to the complainant.

## FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

### **I. Defendants have decimated OCR as part of their goal to eliminate the Department.**

41. Despite the Department’s and OCR’s vital role in fulfilling the “federal commitment . . . to equal educational opportunities,” S. Rep. No. 96-49, at 35, Defendants have taken a series of steps to demolish the Department as a whole and OCR in particular.

42. During his campaign for office, President Donald Trump repeatedly vowed to close the Department of Education. He called the Department “a big con job” and declared that he would

“like to close it immediately.”<sup>4</sup> In an October 2023 video posted to social media, he announced, “One thing I’ll be doing very early in the administration is closing up the Department of Education in Washington D.C., and sending all education and education work and needs back to the states.”<sup>5</sup> In December 2024, he reiterated to TIME Magazine that he wanted to implement “[a] virtual closure of [the] Department of Education.”<sup>6</sup> In another interview, he said that he told the Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon, to put herself “out of a job.”<sup>7</sup>

43. Shortly after President Trump’s inauguration, OCR froze all investigations into complaints filed by members of the public. It instructed staff not to communicate with students, families, and schools involved in their cases and instructed them to cancel scheduled meetings and mediations.<sup>8</sup> While OCR instructed staff that they could review case files, they could not request documents, conduct interviews, participate in meetings or mediations, negotiate resolution agreements, issue letters of finding, or take other steps to investigate or resolve complaints. On February 20, 2025, Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Craig Trainor lifted that pause only

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Michael C. Bender, *Trump Is Said to Be Preparing Order That Aims to Eliminate Education Department*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 6, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/06/us/politics/trump-education-department-executiveorder.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Inskeep, *What Trump’s pledge to close Dept. of Education means for students, GOP-led states*, NPR (Nov. 15, 2024), <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/14/nx-s1-5181966/a-look-at-the-potential-impact-of-shutting-down-the-department-of-education>

<sup>6</sup> *Transcript: Donald Trump’s 2024 Person of the Year Interview*, TIME (Dec. 12, 2024), <https://time.com/7201565/person-of-the-year-2024-donald-trump-transcript/>.

<sup>7</sup> See Zachary B. Wolf, *Trump and Musk are moving to smother these three pieces of the government*, CNN (Feb. 5, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/05/politics/donald-trump-elon-musk-agencies/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> See Jennifer Smith Richard & Jodi S. Cohen, *“We’ve Been Essentially Muzzled”: Department of Education Halts Thousands of Civil Rights Investigations Under Trump*, ProPublica (Feb. 13, 2025), <https://www.propublica.org/article/department-of-education-civil-rights-office-investigations>.

as to complaints that alleged solely disability-based discrimination, meaning that the freeze remained in effect as to complaints that contained claims of race or sex discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

44. On March 3, 2025, the Senate confirmed Linda McMahon as Secretary of Education. Secretary McMahon affirmed that “President Trump believes that the bureaucracy in Washington should be abolished so that we can return education to the states, where it belongs,” and that she “wholeheartedly support[s] and agree[s] with this mission.”<sup>10</sup> Hours after being confirmed, she sent an email to all Department staff entitled “Our Department’s Final Mission.” There, she wrote that the president had tasked the Department “with accomplishing the elimination of bureaucratic bloat here at the Department of Education—a momentous final mission—quickly and responsibly.”<sup>11</sup> On March 11, 2025, she would add that “the President’s mandate,” his “directive to me, clearly, is to shut down the Department of Education.”<sup>12</sup>

45. On March 6, 2025, Secretary McMahon circulated a memo indicating that she was “lifting the pause on the processing of complaints.” But only five days later, the Department gutted OCR’s ability to promptly or equitably investigate most complaints of discrimination.

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<sup>9</sup> See Jennifer Smith Richards & Jodi S. Cohen, *Education Department “Lifting the Pause” on Some Civil Rights Probes, but Not for Race or Gender Cases*, ProPublica (Feb. 20, 2025), <https://www.propublica.org/article/departments-education-civil-rights-investigations-disability-gender-race-discrimination>.

<sup>10</sup> See Lexi Lonas Cochran, *McMahon says she ‘wholeheartedly’ agrees with Trump plan to abolish Education Department*, The Hill (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5162816-mcmahon-abolish-education-department-trump/>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Secretary McMahon: Our Department’s Final Mission (Mar. 3, 2025), <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/speech/secretary-mcmahon-our-departments-final-mission>.

<sup>12</sup> Filip Timotija, *Education Secretary: Mass layoffs first step toward total shutdown*, The Hill (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5190161-linda-mcmahon-education-department-mass-layoffs>.



46. On March 11, 2025, Secretary McMahon announced that “[a]s part of [its] final mission,” the Department had initiated a massive reduction in force.<sup>13</sup> After approximately 572 employees accepted voluntary separation packages, the Department terminated another 1,315 of its approximately 4,113 workers.<sup>14</sup> According to the Department, the combined impact of its staff reductions since January 20, 2025 reduced its workforce by roughly 1,950 workers, cutting its staff almost in half.<sup>15</sup> The RIF terminated 299 OCR workers—more than half of OCR’s staff.<sup>16</sup>

47. On the same day as the RIF, the Department closed seven of OCR’s twelve regional offices—those in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, San Francisco, and Dallas—and terminated all staff members who had worked in those offices.<sup>17</sup> Together, the shuttered field offices served twenty-six states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

48. On March 20, 2025, President Trump confirmed via executive order that the RIF and office closures are part of an effort to close the entire Department. The Executive Order states that “[t]he Secretary of Education shall, to the maximum extent appropriate and permitted by law, take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return authority

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<sup>13</sup> Press Release: U.S. Dep’t of Educ., U.S. Department of Education Initiates Reduction in Force (Mar. 11, 2025), <https://bit.ly/42fXyf8>.

<sup>14</sup> See *id.*; Michael C. Bender & Dana Goldstein, *Education Department Fires 1,300 Workers, Gutting Its Staff*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 11, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/11/us/politics/trump-education-department-firings.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See Press Release: U.S. Dep’t of Educ., U.S. Department of Education Initiates Reduction in Force (Mar. 11, 2025), <https://bit.ly/42fXyf8>.

<sup>16</sup> See Laura Meckler, et al., *How education department layoffs hit student loans, testing, civil rights*, The Washington Post (Mar. 13, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/03/13/education-department-layoffs-student-loans-fafsa-impacts>; Decl. of Jacqueline Clay ¶ 18, *Am. Fed. Of Gov’t Emps. v. U.S. Office of Management and Budget*, No. 3:25-cv-08302-SI, Dkt. No. 117-2 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 28, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Jodi S. Cohen & Jennifer Smith Richards, *Massive Layoffs at the Department of Education Erode Its Civil Rights Division*, ProPublica (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.propublica.org/article/education-department-civil-rights-division-eroded-by-massive-layoffs>

over education to the States and local communities while ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely.”<sup>18</sup>

## **II. Defendants have made it impossible for OCR to fulfill its legal obligations.**

49. Consistent with the stated goal of shutting down the DOE, the RIF created widespread chaos and made it impossible for OCR to fulfill its statutory and regulatory obligations.

50. OCR employees were notified of their termination less than two hours after they received notice of the RIF on March 11, 2025. The notice received by OCR employees stated that “your organizational unit is being abolished along with all positions within the unit—including yours,” and did not comply with standard protocols for RIFs.<sup>19</sup>

51. Both before and immediately after the RIF email notification, Department employees’ access to the Department’s information systems was suddenly restricted. For example, OCR attorneys in the San Francisco office reported that their laptops suddenly and unexpectedly restarted shortly before they received the RIF notice.<sup>20</sup> After that restart, they could no longer communicate with complainants, schools, or anyone else involved in their investigations.<sup>21</sup> Incoming requests are therefore going unaddressed and unacknowledged.

52. Even before the Department decimated its workforce, OCR was already struggling to address a “persistent backlog” of cases. Off. of Civ. Rts., U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Protecting Civil Rights: Highlights of Activities 2021-2025, at 6, <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/protecting->

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<sup>18</sup> Exec. Order 14,242, Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities, 90 Fed. Reg. 13679 (Mar. 20, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Smith Decl. ¶¶ 5–8, Doe Declarant 1 Decl. ¶ 15, *New York v. McMahon*, No. 1:25-cv-10601 (D. Mass. Mar. 24, 2025). From this point forward, citations to declarations refer to those filed in *New York v. McMahon*, No. 1:25-cv-10601 (D. Mass. Mar. 24, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Doe Declarant 1 Decl. ¶¶ 12–22.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*; see also, Hamlin Decl. ¶ 7; Miller Decl. ¶ 13.

civil-rights-109409.pdf. For three consecutive years, from 2022 through 2024, OCR had received the highest number of complaints in its history, with a record high of 20,687 complaints in 2024. *Id.* at 4. Although OCR resolved more complaints from 2021 through 2024 than it had during the previous four years, it still lacked the resources to keep up with the demand: from 2021 through 2024, OCR received approximately 14,547 more complaints than it resolved. *Id.* at 6.<sup>22</sup>

53. To meet these high demands, for 2024, Congress allocated OCR a budget of \$140 million to support the full-time equivalent of 557 employees.<sup>23</sup> For the past fifteen years, the Department has requested funds for between 500 and 800 full time equivalent staff at OCR, stating that such staffing was “necessary” or essential “for OCR to deliver on its statutory and regulatory mandates.”<sup>24</sup> In its 2025 budget request, OCR asked for \$162.4 million for OCR to “support a full time equivalent (FTE) level of 643.” In support, it noted that “OCR’s [staffing] levels have not kept pace with case demand.” It warned if the upward trend in caseloads persisted, “unless staffing

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<sup>22</sup> See Lhamon Decl. ¶¶ 39–42 (noting that even though OCR resolved more complaints during the past four years than it did during the previous administration, it still “strained to meet the volume of need”).

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request 9 (2025).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request 9 (2025); U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request 9 (2024); U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request 10 (2023); U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request BB-9 (2022); U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Request AA-10 (2021); U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request Z-9 (2020); U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Request Z-9 (2019).

is increased, the total increase in complaints [would] reach a level that significantly challenges OCR’s capacity to effectively and efficiently investigate and resolve cases.”<sup>25</sup>

54. OCR cannot fulfill its statutory and regulatory mandates with less than half of the staff it has long deemed necessary. Current and former OCR employees attest that it will not be possible for OCR to do so. One senior OCR manager described the RIF as a “gut punch,” remarking, “I am seeing the 1964 Civil Rights Act eviscerated right before my eyes.”<sup>26</sup> As the former Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights and former head of OCR agreed, the RIF has made OCR “a shell that can’t function.”<sup>27</sup> As another, current employee put it, “There was already a case backlog, and now these cases will simply fall to the wayside.” As a result, “students will suffer harm . . . that, for many, will have repercussions for the rest of their lives.”<sup>28</sup>

55. Indeed, the closed offices—in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco—covered some of the largest population centers in the country. Those closed offices had an aggregate of 208 investigators and part-time investigators—approximately 55% of OCR’s total number of investigators (379)—and handled most of OCR’s open investigations. As a result, the remaining investigators have staggering caseloads. Before the

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request (2025), <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/overview/budget/budget25/justifications/dd-ocr.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Eyal Press, When the Government Stops Defending Civil Rights, *The New Yorker* (Oct. 29, 2025) <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/when-the-government-stops-defending-civil-rights>.

<sup>27</sup> Jodi S. Cohen & Jennifer Smith Richards, *Massive Layoffs at the Department of Education Erode Its Civil Rights Division*, ProPublica (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.propublica.org/article/education-department-civil-rights-division-eroded-by-massive-layoffs>.

<sup>28</sup> Sunlen Serfati, *Students will suffer harm’: Education Department’s civil rights office gutted by layoffs, closures*, CNN (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/12/politics/education-departments-civil-rights-office-layoffs/index.html>.

RIF, OCR's investigators handled an average of over sixty cases at a time.<sup>29</sup> Because of the RIF, OCR investigators now carry untenable caseloads of 168 cases per investigator.<sup>30</sup>

56. The elimination of seven regional offices has also made it impossible for OCR to complete investigations and resolve cases promptly and fairly. OCR investigations often require staff to visit schools in person to conduct witness interviews and on-site inspections for critical fact gathering.<sup>31</sup> For example, the requirements for accessibility for people with disabilities are governed by technical standards that require in-person inspection.<sup>32</sup> But the closure of regional offices will make such travel costly and often infeasible. OCR will also lose the regional expertise and community relationships that those offices had built and used to resolve cases.<sup>33</sup>

57. Predictably, OCR's case resolution numbers have plunged due to the RIF. According to OCR's public data, OCR reached just 165 resolution agreements in 2025, down from 518 in 2024. Meanwhile, OCR's backlog has grown from 20,000 to over 25,000.<sup>34</sup>

58. Although the Department claims it has fast-tracked certain high-profile OCR investigations by collaborating with the Department of Justice, that in no way addresses the fact that OCR in its current hobbled form is incapable of addressing the vast majority of OCR

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Dep't of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request 16 (2025); <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/ocr-fiscal-year-2025-budget-request-39373.pdf>; Lhamon Decl. ¶ 26; Gonzales Decl. ¶¶ 10–11 (noting that the Dallas office employed about 55 employees, and each team of six to seven OCR staff members effectively handled 250 to 300 cases).

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Sens. to Linda McMahon, Sec'y of the Dep't of Educ. at 3 (Oct. 20, 2025), <https://perma.cc/3U65-FNAC>.

<sup>31</sup> Gonzales Decl. ¶ 29.

<sup>32</sup> See Doe Declarant 1 Decl. ¶¶ 21–22.

<sup>33</sup> See Lhamon Decl. ¶¶ 33–38.

<sup>34</sup> Collin Blinkley, *Education Department workers targeted in layoffs are returning to tackle civil rights backlog*, Associated Press, (Dec. 5, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/education-department-closure-layoffs-civil-rights-disability-001478ed94bc6c196f6f9f53a2462083>

complaints. That is particularly true because the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division is undergoing its own downsizing. On April 14, 2025, the newly-appointed head of the Division, as one of her first official actions, circulated a memo announcing that Civil Rights attorneys could apply for a new round of deferred resignation programs. Since then, there has been a “mass exodus” of lawyers from the division, which had already lost 70% of its attorneys by May.<sup>35</sup>

### **III. The Department’s actions abdicate its responsibilities to entire classes of students.**

59. As a result of the RIF, OCR has allowed nearly all discrimination complaints to stall and abdicated its responsibilities to whole classes of students.

60. To be sure, since President Trump’s inauguration, OCR has selectively initiated high-profile investigations into certain limited issues. For example, OCR has opened investigations into programs designed to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. On January 27, 2025, OCR opened an investigation into a public school district for sponsoring an event designed to “provide a safe space for” and to “celebrate and uplift students of color” as part of its inclusion and support efforts.<sup>36</sup> And on March 14, 2025, the Department announced investigations into forty-five universities for partnering with an organization that supports Black, Latino, and Native American students but not white students.<sup>37</sup> The Department has also opened investigations into policies that allow transgender students to access school facilities and activities.

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<sup>35</sup> Sam Levine, *Over 200 ex-staffers decry destruction of DoJ civil rights arm: ‘America deserves better,’* The Guardian (Dec. 9, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> Maddy Vogel, *Trump-Era Education Department Launches Investigation into Ithaca Schools Over Alleged Racial Exclusion*, Ithaca.com (Feb. 4, 2025), [https://www.ithaca.com/news/ithaca/trump-era-education-department-launches-investigation-into-ithaca-schools-over-alleged-racial-exclusion/article\\_b1635a08-e2af-11ef-85e6-7760bf2508d6.html](https://www.ithaca.com/news/ithaca/trump-era-education-department-launches-investigation-into-ithaca-schools-over-alleged-racial-exclusion/article_b1635a08-e2af-11ef-85e6-7760bf2508d6.html).

<sup>37</sup> Press Release: Office of Civil Rights Initiates Title VI Investigations into Institutions of Higher Education (Mar. 14, 2025), <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/office-civil-rights-initiates-title-vi-investigations-institutions-of-higher-education-0>.

61. But such cherry-picked investigations appear to be the only matters the Department is currently pursuing, to the exclusion of other types of discrimination and thousands of complaints that were already pending. Since President Trump’s inauguration, for example, OCR has not publicly disclosed any investigations or resolutions of complaints of race discrimination against Black, Latino, or Indigenous students. Nor has it announced any investigations or resolutions of complaints that allege sexual harassment. And, since the RIF, OCR has not announced any resolution of a complaint into discrimination based on disability. Due to the RIF and the office closures, such complaints cannot be resolved in a prompt and equitable manner.<sup>38</sup>

#### **IV. Defendants’ actions will irreparably harm Plaintiffs and students nationwide.**

62. As a result, students across the country will suffer. As of January 2025, OCR had 12,000 or more active investigations, including nearly 6,000 complaints of disability discrimination; 3,200 of racial harassment or other race discrimination; and 1,000 of sexual harassment, including sexual violence.<sup>39</sup> Behind those complaints, many students are counting on OCR’s intervention to secure needed learning accommodations or to allow them to return to school safely. But if the RIF proceeds, most will never receive meaningful relief.

63. Many OCR cases are time sensitive. They involve the ongoing educational needs of children, often implicating their access to education altogether.

64. For example, a school had refused to allow a kindergarten student to bring a wheelchair on campus until an Individualized Education Program meeting could be held—literally

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<sup>38</sup> Off. for Civil Rights, Dep’t of Educ., Office for Civil Rights Recent Resolution Search, <https://ocras.ed.gov/ocr-search> (last accessed Dec. 9, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Smith Richard & Jodi S. Cohen, *“We’ve Been Essentially Muzzled”: Department of Education Halts Thousands of Civil Rights Investigations Under Trump* (Feb. 13, 2025), <https://www.propublica.org/article/departments-of-education-civil-rights-office-investigations>; Doe Declarant 7 Decl. ¶ 16 (stating that OCR had over 16,000 active investigations in January 2025).

blocking the student from accessing school. OCR's rapid resolution procedure allowed the situation to be resolved such that the student was able to start school on time.<sup>40</sup> Without OCR's intervention, that student could have been forced to miss the entire school year, costing the student instructional time and school experience they could never get back.

65. Likewise, a special education advocate, Craig Haller, filed an OCR complaint in January 2025 against Brookline, Massachusetts Public Schools alleging systemic discrimination against students with disabilities. Mr. Haller's complaint alleges that the school district redirected federal funds that were earmarked for special education services to cover an approximately \$8 million shortfall in the district's budget—and that funds for other programs were not similarly diverted. As a result, the district delayed payments to special education service providers for months, and multiple families have reported that they have experienced long delays in obtaining the services their children need for their disabilities and that their children had to miss sessions with providers.<sup>41</sup>

66. Prior to the RIF, Mr. Haller's complaint would have been handled by OCR's Boston office. Now, it is unclear which office, if any, is addressing the complaint, as Mr. Haller has received no updates on his matter since it was filed. As a result, on information and belief, special education services continue to be disrupted in the Brookline school district.

#### **A. Plaintiffs Tara Blunt and T.R.**

67. Plaintiff Tara Blunt and her son represent another troubling example. Ms. Blunt filed an OCR complaint after her child, Plaintiff T.R., experienced regular harassment based on

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<sup>40</sup> Lhamon Decl. ¶¶ 19–20.

<sup>41</sup> See also Mandy McLaren, *Brookline schools have a budget mess. The town's taxpayers will pay for an audit to sort it out.*, Boston Globe (Feb. 12, 2025, 1:00 PM), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/02/12/metro/brookline-special-education-disabilities-financial-mismanagement/?p1=StaffPage>.



his race over the course of two school years, from spring 2022 through spring 2023. A group of other students regularly referred to him with racial epithets. They called him a “n\*gger” and a “monkey,” said he had “bird’s nest hair,” and told him his skin looked like a “turd.” They pushed and hit him at recess. In October 2022, one of the students pushed T.R. to the ground and stomped on his head, and teachers found T.R. crying in the fetal position. T.R. and Ms. Blunt reported the harassment to teachers and administrators, but they did not offer any plan to protect T.R. from the ongoing racial harassment or take meaningful action end it. With T.R. afraid to return to his public school, Ms. Blunt saw no viable choice but to withdraw him from the school district and enroll him in a local private school, where T.R.’s family has had to pay tuition, fees, and other costs.

68. On June 20, 2023, Ms. Blunt filed an OCR complaint under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The complaint described the school district’s failure to respond to the repeated racial harassment and the retaliation that T.R. experienced for his complaints to the school. Ms. Blunt amended that complaint through counsel on August 21, 2023. Relying on OCR’s longstanding guidance regarding Title VI racial harassment complaints, which does not apply to Title VI lawsuits, Ms. Blunt’s complaint alleges that (1) T.R. experienced “severe, pervasive or persistent” race-based harassment, (2) the school district had at least “constructive” notice of the harassment, and (3) it failed to take “reasonable” steps to eliminate the hostile environment.

69. On December 7, 2023, OCR opened an investigation into “[w]hether the Falls City Public Schools failed to respond in a reasonable, timely, and effective manner to notice of a hostile environment based on [T.R.’s] race, in violation of Title VI and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. § 100.3” and whether it engaged in retaliation in response to Ms. Blunt’s complaints.

70. If OCR continued its investigation and remedied the hostile environment in Falls City Public Schools—for example, by compelling the school district to train teachers and improve

its policies and procedures for handling racial harassment, or to devise a plan to protect T.R. from future harassment—Ms. Blunt would consider returning T.R. to public school, for which his family would not have to pay tuition. If OCR were to complete its investigation, the family could also obtain other relief, including reimbursement for the costs of T.R.’s private-school tuition and for medical and therapy expenses caused by the harassment.

71. Due to the RIF, however, T.R.’s complaint is likely to remain uninvestigated and unresolved. The Kansas City office, to which T.R.’s complaint was assigned, has absorbed all of the cases previously assigned to OCR’s much larger Dallas office, which had approximately 2,000 pending complaints and covered Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. As the Dallas office’s Chief Attorney testified, “[i]t is not possible for the Kansas City enforcement office to absorb this work” and still process its “own caseload,” which it is “already struggling” to handle.<sup>42</sup>

**B. Plaintiffs Karen Josefosky and A.J.**

72. Plaintiff Karen Josefosky and her son, Plaintiff A.J., represent yet another example of the devastating effects of the RIF. A.J. began third grade in August 2023. A.J. has life-threatening allergies, including an allergy to dairy, that interfere with major life activities, including his breathing, and constitute a disability under Section 504. Because of his severe allergies, his Section 504 plan indicated that his classroom must be kept dairy-free.

73. Throughout the 2023–24 school year, A.J. was repeatedly harassed in class based on his disabilities. Classmates called A.J. names, pulled his glasses off his face, shoved him, and punched him. They waved food with his allergens and taunted him to touch it or eat it. They rubbed cheese on his desk. On November 13, 2023, a student poured milk on A.J.’s lunch and said, “[a]llergies are dumb.” In another incident, another student poured milk on A.J.’s coat as other

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<sup>42</sup> Gonzales Decl. ¶ 19.

students laughed. On April 15, 2024, ten students surrounded A.J., pushed him, tripped him, slapped his laptop closed, tried to take his glasses, put cutouts of cheese on his desk and his cubby, and put a cheese crown on his head, among other forms of harassment. Ms. Josefosky reported the harassment throughout the school year, but the harassment continued.

74. After the April 15, 2024 assault, A.J. no longer felt safe returning to school. As a result, Ms. Josefosky withdrew A.J. from public school and homeschooled him for the remainder of the year and the following two school years (fourth and fifth grade).

75. On September 2, 2024, Ms. Josefosky filed an OCR complaint alleging that the school failed to address A.J.'s experiences of disability-based harassment and to implement A.J.'s Section 504 plan. The complaint also sought reimbursement for A.J.'s therapy as a result of the alleged discrimination and funds for alternative schooling.

76. On October 1, 2024, OCR opened an investigation into “whether a student was subjected to harassing conduct on the basis of disability . . . and, if so, whether the District failed to investigate promptly and to respond appropriately, in violation of 34 C.F.R. § 104.4, and the Title II implementing regulation at 28 C.F.R. § 35.130.” The investigation would also assess “whether the District failed to provide a qualified student with a disability with a free appropriate public education (FAPE), in violation of the Section 504 implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. § 104.33.” This case was assigned to the Cleveland OCR office.

77. Shortly after OCR opened the investigation, OCR recommended a mediation and the parties began to discuss potential dates. On February 5, 2025, however, OCR informed the Josefoskys that the investigation had been paused. After that, OCR did not contact the Josefoskys to reschedule the mediation or indicate that any progress had been made on the case.

78. If OCR had continued its investigation and involvement, the parties would have soon proceeded to mediation through OCR at no cost to the Josefuskys.

79. OCR would have been invaluable in helping A.J.'s school develop protocols for how to implement Section 504 and deal with disability-based harassment. OCR could have compelled the school district to train teachers and staff to respond to disability harassment, devised other ways to protect A.J. from future harassment, and provided other remedies requested. And it then could have followed up to ensure these remedies were properly implemented.

80. Instead, the RIF stalled A.J.'s investigation while the harassment at his public school remained unremediated, effectively barring A.J. from attending school there.

81. Eventually, with his OCR investigation stalled and no other reasonable avenues to relief available, A.J.'s family had to settle his claims against the school privately. As a result, he had to withdraw his OCR complaint. Without OCR's help, however, the family has not felt comfortable that the harassment will not recur if A.J. returns to public school. As a result, he remains out of school to this day. His parents are homeschooling him.

**C. Plaintiffs Amy Cook and M.C.**

82. The March RIF also stalled Amy Cook's OCR complaint, leaving her ten-year-old daughter, M.C., without equal access to a public education.

83. During the 2023-2024 school year, M.C. attended elementary school in the Kalamazoo Public Schools. In November 2023, she was sexually assaulted by a classmate. After the assault, the classmate continued to harass M.C. in school based on the sexual assault and M.C.'s response to it. The other student and the student's friends called M.C. names, wrote vulgarities on her locker, and attacked her physically. Ms. Cook complained to the school principal and the district superintendent. But school officials did not take adequate steps to address the sex-based

harassment, and it continued. M.C. was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder due to the harassment she experienced, and she was so afraid to return to public school that she would sometimes vomit when she thought about it. As a result, Ms. Cook withdrew M.C. from her school.

84. Because the Cooks could not afford private school, they sent M.C. to another school within the same district. But they soon encountered problems there too. To cope with the trauma she had experienced, M.C. began to wear makeup, which made her feel more confident and less scared in school. She made friends with a boy in class with whom she felt comfortable. M.C.'s new teacher, however, disapproved of the makeup and M.C.'s friendship with a boy and would criticize her for them in class. Ms. Cook reported this to the principal. The next school day, though, M.C.'s teacher pulled her aside and berated her for the report, calling her a liar. M.C. came home crying. Ms. Cook called the school about the teacher's retaliation, but no one returned her call. With M.C. afraid to go back to school, Ms. Cook withdrew her from the school district entirely.

85. In or around May of 2024, Ms. Cook filed an OCR complaint alleging that the school district violated Title IX by failing to adequately respond to the hostile environment M.C. experienced. Ms. Cook also reported the teacher's retaliation against M.C. to OCR. OCR's Cleveland office opened an investigation into whether the school district violated Title IX.

86. Ms. Cook followed up with the OCR investigator periodically, and the investigator regularly responded with updates. Before the new administration took office, the investigator told Ms. Cook the investigation was almost done and that the case would likely reach a resolution soon.

87. As a result of the March RIF, however, the office handling Ms. Cook's complaint closed. On March 17, OCR emailed Ms. Cook's attorney that OCR's Denver office would be handling cases from the former Cleveland office. Since then, however, Ms. Cook has not received any update about the status of the investigation. The case remains in limbo.

88. While M.C. remains unable to attend school, Ms. Cook does her best to educate M.C. at home. M.C. is lonely and wants to go back to school. If OCR got the school district to take steps that would protect M.C., Ms. Cook would send M.C. back to public school.

**D. Plaintiff Victim Rights Law Center**

89. By precluding OCR's ability to promptly and equitably investigate most discrimination complaints, Defendants have upended one of VRLC's core activities—representing students in OCR investigations—and forced VRLC to divert resources to exploring alternative remedies for its clients and for attorneys nationwide who seek VRLC's advice.

90. VRLC's mission is to help survivors of sexual violence rebuild their lives. VRLC relies on grant funding to support that mission. As a condition of its funding, VRLC must dedicate eighty percent of representation activities to sexual assault victims. And because most sexual assault victims are youth or young adults, most of VRLC's clients require legal assistance in education matters. VRLC assists them in Title IX grievance procedures, obtaining Section 504 accommodations for a disability caused or aggravated by post-sexual-assault trauma, and in filing administrative complaints when their schools violate Title IX or Section 504.

91. As a result, VRLC frequently represents students in OCR investigations. Its attorneys advise students about the OCR process, collect facts and conduct legal research into potential claims, prepare and file complaints with OCR on students' behalf, and assist students during the investigation. VRLC employs approximately five attorneys who represent students in OCR investigations. Because VRLC does not have the capacity to take most cases to litigation, the OCR process provides the only viable way to obtain relief for many of its clients.

92. VRLC currently represents complainants in several OCR investigations. All of these complaints were pending in OCR's Boston office, which is now closed. The OCR

investigators and points of contact for those cases were terminated during the RIF. Since then, VRLC has attempted to contact OCR to ascertain the status of its pending cases, but it has not received any response. Due to the RIF, OCR is now unlikely to provide VRLC's clients with timely or meaningful relief. As a result, VRLC has had to turn away clients.

93. In another core program vital to VRLC's mission, VRLC provides advice to advocates, attorneys, and campus professionals across the country who work with victims of gender-based violence in education settings. VRLC employs two full time staff attorneys who dedicate their time to reviewing such education-related requests, conducting research necessary to address them, and counseling the person seeking advice. Three other staff attorneys advise on education-related matters in addition to other subjects. In the last 12 months, VRLC provided 201 consultations to legal advocates and attorneys on education-related matters.

94. The RIF and office closures have also prompted a flood of requests for advice about other avenues to relief from attorneys and advocates across the country, including advocates who had pending complaints in offices closed during the RIF. These requests have already required VRLC attorneys to conduct hours of research that they would not have had to conduct when OCR was a viable path to timely and meaningful relief. To counsel attorneys about OCR, VRLC did not need to conduct any research because OCR's procedures are uniform and available to students, families, and advocates nationwide, and its staff was already familiar with the OCR process. Now, however, VRLC's staff must conduct hours of jurisdiction-specific research to determine the alternative options available to victims in particular states and territories, if any.

**V. Defendants have continued to take unlawful actions designed to dismantle OCR.**

95. On June 18, 2025, this Court issued a preliminary injunction that stayed the March RIF and required Defendants to restore the affected employees to active duty. Defendants, however, did not return a single OCR employee to work for over two months. On August 13, 2025,

the Court denied Defendants’ motion to vacate or stay the preliminary injunction and found that Defendants had failed to substantially comply with it. After the Court issued that order, on August 19, 2025, Defendants committed to return approximately 264 OCR employees (those subject to the March RIF who remained employed by OCR and had not resigned) to active duty on a staggered schedule from September through early November 2025. On September 29, 2025, however, the First Circuit stayed the preliminary injunction pending appeal.

96. After the First Circuit stayed the preliminary injunction, the Department took at least two additional steps designed to dismantle OCR.

97. First, on October 10, 2025, the Department initiated another reduction in force that would have terminated 137 more OCR employees—in addition to the 299 who were part of the March RIF.<sup>43</sup> On October 15, Secretary McMahon confirmed that the rationale for the new RIF was the same as the March RIF: to dismantle OCR. In a post on X, the social media platform, she stated that “the federal Department of Education is unnecessary, and we should return education to the states. The Department has taken additional steps to . . . root out the education bureaucracy that has burdened states and educators with unnecessary oversight.”<sup>44</sup>

98. Second, on October 14, 2025, the Department restarted the March RIF that was previously paused by this Court’s now stayed preliminary injunction. As of October 14, 2025, 247 of the 299 employees covered by the March RIF had not resigned and remained employed by OCR. On October 14, the Department sent those 247 employees an email stating that “[p]ursuant

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<sup>43</sup> Decl. of Jacqueline Clay ¶ 14, *Am. Fed. Of Gov’t Emps. v. U.S. Office of Management and Budget*, No. 3:25-cv-08302-SI, Dkt. No. 117-2 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 28, 2025).

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Mervosh and Michael C. Bender, *No Education Department? No problem, Trump’s Education Secretary Says*, New York Times (Oct. 23, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/21/us/education-department-shutdown-layoffs.html>



to” the First Circuit’s decision “regarding the implementation” of the March RIF, the Department “is continuing with the RIF,” and “your separation date has been adjusted to November 3, 2025.”<sup>45</sup>

99. On October 28, 2025, at the request of a group of unions, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California issued a preliminary injunction that pauses both the March and October 10 RIFs. *See Am. Fed. of State Cnty. and Municipal Emps. v. U.S. Office of Management and Budget*, No. 3:25-cv-08302-SI, Dkt. No. 94 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 28, 2025).

100. If both the March and October RIFs were to proceed as planned, they would leave OCR with only 62 employees—approximately one tenth of the 2024 workforce. The Department still has not provided any reasoned explanation for either the March or October RIFs or explained how OCR could deliver on its mandates after the planned terminations.

## **VI. The Continuing Appropriations Act**

101. In November 2025, Congress invalidated the March and October RIFs.

102. On October 1, 2025, a government shutdown commenced due to a lapse of congressional appropriations. During the 43 days the shutdown continued, both parties in Congress engaged in negotiations over the terms on which appropriations would be restored.

103. Those negotiations culminated in a compromise bill that Congress passed and the President signed on November 12, 2025: The Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026, Pub. L. No. 119-37, 119th Cong. (Nov. 12, 2025) (the “Continuing Appropriations Act”). Section 120(e) of the Continuing Appropriations Act provides in relevant part that “any reduction in force proposed, noticed, initiated, executed, implemented, or otherwise taken by an Executive Agency between October 1, 2025, and the date of enactment, shall have no force or effect.” *Id.* § 120(e).

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<sup>45</sup> Decl. of Jacqueline Clay Ex. A, *Am. Fed. Of Gov’t Emps. v. U.S. Office of Management and Budget*, No. 3:25-cv-08302-SI, Dkt. No. 117-2 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 28, 2025).

104. By its plain terms, Section 120(e) applies not only to RIFs that were “proposed, noticed,” or “initiated” during the shutdown, but also to RIFs that were “executed, implemented, or otherwise taken” during that time. Since OCR executed and implemented the March RIF during the shutdown—by reinitiating that RIF in October 2025—the RIF lacks force and effect.

105. After Congress enacted the Continuing Appropriations Act, the Department rescinded the RIF notices sent to the 137 OCR employees covered by the second, October 10 RIF. Nonetheless, Defendants have indicated—in public filings and in correspondence with counsel for Plaintiffs in this case—that they do not believe that Section 120(e) of the Continuing Appropriations Act applies to the March RIF, and they do not intend to rescind that RIF absent a court order. Thus, although the Continuing Appropriations Act required federal agencies to rescind the covered RIFs and to give notice of such rescission to “all affected employees” by November 17, 2025, Defendants have not sent any such notice to employees covered by the March RIF.

106. On November 5, 2025, the Department ordered the March RIF employees to return to work while litigation over the RIF proceeds. But its statements and actions have made clear that it intends to continue the March RIF as soon as it can do so without violating a court order.

### **CLASS ALLEGATIONS**

107. Plaintiffs T.R. and M.C. bring their claims as a class action for injunctive and declaratory relief under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23(b)(2). The Class should be certified because the challenged conduct applies generally to the Class, and a single injunction, along with corresponding declaratory relief, will provide indivisible relief to every Class member.

108. Plaintiffs request that the court appoint M.C. and T.R. as class representatives and certify the following Class under Rule 23(b)(2):

All persons for whom relief is sought through a pending OCR complaint that “indicates a possible failure to comply” with Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, or Title II and that was timely filed under federal regulations. 34 C.F.R. § 100.7(b).

109. The Class satisfies Rule 23(a)(1) because it is sufficiently numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable. As of January 25, OCR had over 12,000 active investigations, meaning that OCR had determined that those investigations were timely and indicated a possible violation of the civil rights laws that OCR enforces. The Class thus has thousands of members.

110. The Class satisfies Rule 23(a)(2) because there are questions of law and fact common to the proposed Class, including whether the March RIF violated the Administrative Procedure Act, whether the March RIF violated the Department of Education Organization Act, whether the March RIF lacks force and effect under the Continuing Appropriations Act, and whether the March RIF violated OCR’s statutory and regulatory mandates.

111. Plaintiffs T.R. and M.C. satisfy Rule 23(a)(3) because their claims are typical of the Class’s claims. They challenge the March RIF on grounds that apply equally to the Class. Like other Class members, Plaintiffs have timely, pending OCR complaints that need to be resolved in a fair, efficient, and effective manner to allow them equal access to educational opportunities, and the relief they request would allow OCR to investigate and resolve their complaints, as well as the complaints of all class members, more quickly and effectively.

112. The proposed Class representatives also satisfy Rule 23(a)(4) because they would fairly and adequately represent the Class. Because the RIF has stalled their OCR investigations and delayed the relief T.R. and M.C. need to go back to public school, they share the Class’s interest in obtaining an injunction and declaratory relief to vacate the RIF and restore OCR’s

workforce so that OCR can promptly resolve complaints.

113. Finally, the Class satisfies Rule 23(b)(2) because the effects of the March RIF apply generally to the Class, such that injunctive or corresponding declaratory relief is appropriate respecting the Class as a whole.

114. Pursuant to Rule 23(g), the Court should appoint Public Justice and Glenn Agre Bergman & Fuentes LLP as Class Counsel. They have extensive experience in civil rights and class actions, have no conflicts, and are committed to vigorously representing the Class.

## **CAUSES OF ACTION**

### **Count I**

#### **Violation of the Administrative Procedure Act - Arbitrary & Capricious and Abuse of Discretion (Against All Defendants)**

115. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference all paragraphs above.

116. The APA requires that a court “hold unlawful and set aside agency action, findings, and conclusions found to be . . . arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law.” 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A). Under this provision, a court may hold unlawful and set aside an agency action when the agency fails to provide a reasonable explanation for its action, including a rational connection between the facts found and the choice made, when an agency relies on factors that Congress did not intend for it to consider, or when an agency fails to consider an important aspect of the problem before making its decision.

117. The March RIF is arbitrary and capricious because, among other things, the Department provided no reasoned basis or explanation for the decision; relied on an impermissible consideration—the Secretary’s stated goal to close the Department; failed to consider the consequences of the RIF, including for OCR’s ability to promptly and equitably investigate complaints of unlawful discrimination and perform its other functions; disregarded the

Department's own findings regarding backlogs and staffing needs; and made it impossible for OCR to comply with the statutes and regulations OCR is charged with enforcing.

118. Under 5 U.S.C. § 706 and 28 U.S.C. § 2201, Plaintiffs are entitled to a declaration that these actions violate the APA because they are arbitrary and capricious.

119. Plaintiffs are also entitled to a vacatur of the March RIF and office closures and an injunction requiring appropriate action to ensure that OCR can fulfill its statutory and regulatory mandates.

**Count II**  
**Violation of the Administrative Procedure Act – Contrary to Law**  
**(Against All Defendants)**

120. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference all paragraphs above.

121. Defendants are “agenc[ies]” under the APA. 5 U.S.C. § 551(1).

122. Under the APA, a court must “hold unlawful and set aside agency action, findings, and conclusions found to be . . . contrary to constitutional right, power, privilege, or immunity,” or “in excess of statutory jurisdiction, authority, or limitations, or short of statutory right.” 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(B)–(C). Under these provisions, a court may hold unlawful and set aside agency action that violates a statute, the Constitution, or federal regulations.

123. The March RIF, which eliminated more than half of OCR's staff and closed half of its regional offices, violates the mandates of Title VI and Title IX to effectuate the provisions of those statutes. It also violates the mandates of federal regulations that require OCR to investigate potential violations of Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, and Title II.

124. The March RIF is also contrary to the Continuing Appropriations Act, which provides that any RIF “executed, implemented, or otherwise taken” between October 1, 2025, and November 12, 2025, “shall have no force or effect.” Pub. L. No. 119-37, 119th Cong. (2025).

Although the March RIF was first proposed and noticed in March, it was executed, implemented, and otherwise taken in October 2025, after the First Circuit stayed the preliminary injunction.

125. The March RIF and office closures also violate 20 U.S.C. § 3473(a)(1), which provides that the Secretary may not “consolidate, alter, or discontinue” OCR.

126. Under 5 U.S.C. § 706 and 28 U.S.C. § 2201, Plaintiffs are entitled to a declaration that these actions violate the above laws and exceed Defendants’ statutory authority.

127. Plaintiffs are also entitled to a vacatur of the March RIF and office closures and an injunction requiring appropriate action to ensure that OCR can fulfill its statutory and regulatory mandates.

**Count III**  
**Ultra Vires Action in Excess of Statutory Authority**  
**(Against All Defendants)**

128. Plaintiffs reallege and incorporate by reference all paragraphs above.

129. Federal courts may set aside agency action or inaction that exceeds an agency’s constitutional or statutory authority, including action or inaction that violates a clear and mandatory statutory command or that lacks a contemporaneous, reasoned justification.

130. By eliminating approximately half of OCR’s staff and closing half its regional offices, Defendants have violated the mandates of Title VI and Title IX to effectuate the provisions of those statutes. Those actions also violate the federal regulations that require OCR to promptly investigate potential violations of Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, and Title II.

131. The March RIF is contrary to the Continuing Appropriations Act, which provides that any RIF “executed, implemented, or otherwise taken” between October 1, 2025, and November 12, 2025, “shall have no force or effect.” Pub. L. No. 119-37, 119th Cong. (2025).

132. The March RIF and office closures also violate 20 U.S.C. § 3473(a)(1), which provides that the Secretary may not “consolidate, alter, or discontinue” OCR.

133. Defendants have not supported the March RIF and office closures with a contemporaneous, reasoned justification.

134. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2201, Plaintiffs are entitled to a declaration that the March RIF and office closures exceed Defendants’ statutory authority.

135. Plaintiffs are also entitled to an injunction setting aside the March RIF and office closures and requiring appropriate action to ensure that OCR can fulfill its statutory and regulatory mandates.

#### **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs request that this Court:

1. Declare that the March RIF and the decision to close half of OCR’s regional offices violates the Administrative Procedure Act and exceeds Defendants’ lawful authority.
2. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 706, vacate the March RIF and office closures.
3. Preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendants to take appropriate actions to remedy the effects of the RIF and office closures so that OCR can fulfill its legal mandates;
4. Retain jurisdiction for at least two years to enforce this relief;
5. Award Plaintiffs their reasonable fees, costs, and expenses, including attorneys’ fees, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2412; and
6. Grant such other equitable relief as the Court deems just and proper.

Dated: December 10, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Sean Ouellette

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that this document filed through the CM/ECF system will be sent electronically to registered participants as identified in the Notice of Electronic Filing.

/s/ Sean Ouellette

Sean Ouellette