

Trump administration warns Ohio State, UC to address antisemitism or risk federal funding

The Trump administration's new antisemitism task force pulled \$400 million in funding to Columbia University. The Education Department warned these two Ohio universities could be among the next.

By Sheridan Hendrix
Columbus Dispatch

The Trump administration sent letters Monday to dozens of universities warning they could face consequences if they fail to protect Jewish students under federal civil rights law, including two Ohio public universities. But at least one of those schools hasn't yet seen the letter they were said to have received.

Ohio State University and the University of Cincinnati were two of the 60 schools that received a letter, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The department [said in a news release Monday](#) that the Office for Civil Rights sent letters to universities that were already under investigation for alleged violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, specifically related to reports of antisemitic discrimination and harassment.

Secretary of Education Linda McMahon said in the news release that the Education Department is "deeply disappointed" that Jewish students have continued to "fear for their safety amid the relentless antisemitic eruptions" while enrolled at U.S. universities.

"University leaders must do better," McMahon said, adding that universities' federal funding hinges on "scrupulous adherence to federal antidiscrimination laws."

When reached for comment Tuesday morning, Ohio State spokesperson Ben Johnson said university officials had yet to receive the letter.

"We have not received a letter at this time," Johnson said. "Ohio State has no tolerance for antisemitism, discrimination or hatred."

Katie Pence, spokesperson at the University of Cincinnati, said Tuesday that "any form of discrimination or harassment, including that based on shared ancestry such as antisemitism, will not be tolerated" at the university.

"We remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering a civil, respectful and supportive environment for all," Pence said.

Pence did not confirm whether or not the university had received its letter from the Education Department.

The letter comes after the Trump administration [canceled \\$400 million in grants and contracts to Columbia University](#) last week and accused the institution of "continued inaction in the face of persistent harassment of Jewish students." Those funds, however, were canceled through the administration's antisemitism task force, not the Office for Civil Rights, which has its own procedures.

In January, President Donald Trump signed an executive order creating an antisemitism task force. The Education Department launch investigations at five universities related to reported antisemitism. Those five schools received the Education Department's latest letter, as well as 55 other universities that "are under investigation or monitoring in response to complaints filed with OCR," according to the news release.

The Education Department hasn't updated its webpage of pending OCR cases since Jan. 14, about a week before Trump took office. While Ohio State is listed as having a pending Title VI case related to "national origin discrimination involving religion," the University of Cincinnati is not listed.

According to The Cincinnati Enquirer, [UC resolved a federal complaint in December](#), alleging that officials ignored several reports

of alleged harassment toward Jewish and Palestinian students in the 2023-24 school year.

Last January, [OCR opened an investigation alleging that Ohio State](#) "discriminated against students on the basis of their national origin (shared Jewish ancestry) by failing to respond to incidents of harassment on the University campus during fall 2023."

Ohio State was one of many college campuses last spring that [erupted in protests against the Israel Hamas war](#). [More than three dozen people](#), many of whom were undergraduates students, were arrested over several days on the Columbus campus. Hundreds of Ohio State students, faculty and community members rallied and set up tents outside the student union [calling for an end to violence in Gaza](#).

Nathaniel Grossman, spokesperson for OSU Hillel, said the group is in "constant communication with university leaders, and we will continue to partner with them to ensure that Ohio State is a safe and welcoming environment for Jewish students."

"We believe that everyone has a critical role to play in countering antisemitism and ensuring Jewish life on OSU's campus is strong and vibrant," Grossman said.

Two other Ohio universities have pending Title VI investigations, Case Western Reserve University and Youngstown State University, though neither of those schools received letters from the Education Department.

Craig Trainor, acting assistant secretary for civil rights, said in the letter that schools often respond to individual reports of harassment but fail to consider how those instances might contribute to a hostile environment. Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color and national origin in any program and activity receiving federal financial assistance.

"Put simply, failure to take sufficient measures to address antisemitic harassment based on shared ancestry violates Title VI," Trainor said.