

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 5, 2025

Denise Carter

Acting Secretary of Education

U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20202

Dear Acting Secretary Carter,

We write with serious concerns about actions at the U.S. Department of Education (the Department), in light of the troubling developments across the federal government since January 20, 2025.

Over the course of two weeks, the Trump Administration issued sweeping executive orders and sought to broadly and illegally freeze federal financial assistance. Federal employees have been targeted, in some cases for simply following the law. Elon Musk is attempting to shut down the work of entire agencies while gaining access to some of the federal government's most far reaching and sensitive data systems.

In just the last few days security officials at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) were put on leave after refusing non-government workers access to sensitive personnel information and classified systems.<sup>1</sup> On Monday morning, USAID staff were told not to report to the agency and more than 600 employees were locked out of their computer systems and put on leave.<sup>2</sup> Media reports indicate a similar effort may be underway at the Department of Education. Media reports are all we can rely on at this point because the Department has not shared any information on its plans with the authorizing Committees of jurisdiction responsible for establishing the Department, its organizational structure and programs; or the Committees on Appropriations responsible for funding it.

The Department has been a target of President Trump and his unelected advisors since even prior to his inauguration.<sup>3</sup> And recently, the Department has put workers on administrative leave for attending trainings promoted by former Secretary Betsy DeVos,<sup>4</sup> once touted among results achieved by the Department,<sup>5</sup> and coerced employees into leaving their jobs.<sup>6</sup> Workers at the Department—like those across the government—have been made to fear their jobs will be

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/usaids-security-leaders-removed-refusing-elon-musks-doge-employees-accr-rcna190357>

<sup>2</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/trump-musk-usaid-c0c7799be0b2fa7cad4c806565985fe2>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/weekly-education/2025/01/06/doge-vs-the-education-department-00196523>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5123000-education-department-dei-trump/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/reports/annual/2020plan/fy18apr-fy20app.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.axios.com/2025/01/28/trump-federal-workers-quit-severance>

reclassified so that they lose employment protections.<sup>7</sup> Some staff from the entity referred to as the Department of Government Efficiency have reportedly gained access to internal Department data systems, including financial aid systems that include personally identifiable information on millions of students. These actions appear to be part of a broader plan to dismantle the federal government until it is unable to function and meet the needs of the American people.

We will not stand by and allow the impact that dismantling the Department of Education would have on the nation's students, parents, borrowers, educators, and communities. Congress created the Department to ensure all students in America have equal access to a high-quality education and that their civil rights are protected no matter their zip code. The Department is in the middle of implementing the FAFSA for the 2025-2026 school year and cannot afford any disruptions to that critical work. The Department also oversees vital federal aid programs that help students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, student veterans, students experiencing homelessness, rural students, educators, and parents in need of childcare across the country. To further these activities, the Department maintains sensitive, personally identifiable information about these students and their families, which must be protected from people bent on ending these critical programs created over decades through bipartisan laws passed by Congress.

We urge you to provide information on the steps the Department is taking to ensure the continuity of programs that Americans depend on, the ability of the Department to effectively administer programs for their intended purposes without waste, fraud and abuse, and the safeguards in place to protect student data privacy. We therefore request the following by Friday February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

1. Provide a list of all individuals, including their job titles and offices and whether they are federal government employees, who have been granted access to personally identifiable or sensitive information since January 20, 2025, the training provided to such individuals on the requirements for handling personally identifiable or sensitive information, the specific information to which they have they been granted access and the legal purpose to granting them access to that information, and whether students have been notified that their personally identifiable or sensitive information has been accessed.
2. Provide an explanation of all steps the Department has taken to protect sensitive, personally identifiable data in the Department's control, including but not limited to the National Student Loan Data System, the Common Origination and Disbursement System, and the FAFSA Processing System.
  - a. Provide information on how those steps have been communicated to each individual with access to that data.
3. Provide a list of all individuals placed on administrative leave or terminated from the Department since January 20, 2025, including their job title, duties and responsibilities, office, and the reason for the leave or termination.
4. Provide all communications to Department employees who have been placed on administrative leave or terminated since January 20, 2025.
5. Confirm that the Department has not frozen, paused, impeded, blocked, canceled, or terminated any awards or obligations since January 20, 2025 (other than the cancellation

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.axios.com/local/washington-dc/2025/01/28/trump-executive-order-federal-workforce>

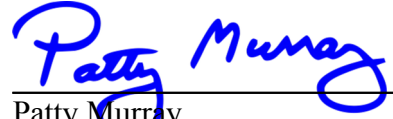
of training and service contracts announced in the Department's January 23, 2025 Press Release).

Sincerely,



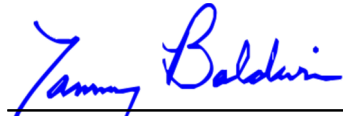
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Bernard Sanders  
Ranking Member, Committee  
on Health, Education, Labor,  
and Pensions



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Patty Murray  
Vice Chair,  
Committee on Appropriations



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Tammy Baldwin  
Ranking Member,  
Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies



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Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member, Committee  
on Education and Workforce



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Rosa L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress