

# Attacks on the Federal Workforce: Risks to Women, Children, and Families

***“We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected. When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work...because they are increasingly viewed as the villains.”***

***Russ Vought, OMB Director***

A fundamental part of the Trump Administration’s first 100 days strategy is to weaken and dismantle as much of our federal government as possible. Led by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)—Trump is aggressively targeting federal agencies and their staff to further concentrate power at the White House, to scare federal workers into anticipatory compliance with requests that are likely illegal, to unilaterally cut or undermine core services, and to undermine the public’s confidence in our government. Federal workers with decades of experience recently rewarded with more responsibility for their hard work and expertise are included in the dismissals. Losing that institutional knowledge and area expertise will plunge government programs into further chaos. These attacks are also designed to advance Trump’s larger agenda, including:

- 1. Passing tax cuts for billionaires.** Republicans are intent on passing permanent tax cuts primarily going to corporations and the wealthy, which will add trillions to the national debt. As the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [conveyed to Congress](#), it is impossible for Congress to meet their budget targets without making massive cuts to or eliminating key programs, including Medicaid and Medicare. The more of the federal government Trump and Elon Musk can dismantle through executive actions, including by eliminating staff, reducing core agency functions, and cutting grants, the more they can claim they are offsetting the astronomical cost of their tax cuts for billionaires, with families unknowingly footing the bill.

- 2. Supercharging Trump's anti-immigrant agenda.** Along with tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans, Trump has asked Congress to approve at least \$350 billion dollars for more immigration enforcement, including further militarizing our border and detaining and deporting undocumented and some lawfully present immigrants. Trump and Elon Musk plan to use mass cuts to the federal workforce and essential programs to help pay for more raids in schools, churches, and hospitals that further tear apart families and leave communities struggling.
- 3. Eliminating any internal opposition to Trump's lawless agenda.** Trump railed during his first term about the "deep state," a conspiracy theory he propagated claiming that federal bureaucrats were actively sabotaging his presidency. The firing of career officials is intended to create a chilling effect, thereby reducing the likelihood that civil servants will oppose or question Trump policies, even when they're illegal. As we saw during Trump's first term, it was often career officials who helped mitigate harm simply by following the law. (E.g., see [Jonathan White](#) and [Alexander Vindman](#).)
- 4. Fomenting distrust in the federal government.** For decades, the conservative right has been working to reduce the size and scope of the federal government, and undermine federal protections that establish guardrails against discriminatory and sometimes corrupt actions by the public and private sector. Efforts over the last several decades have focused on sending functions of the federal government back to the states or delegating them to private contractors, loosening restrictions on federal funding, or underfunding federal agencies. Funding cuts and mass firings prioritized by DOGE will make it harder for federal agencies to serve the public and meet their mission, which will undermine public trust in these institutions and make it easier to dismantle them.
- 5. Upending Civil Rights Protections.** Another long-sought goal of conservatives is to reverse the progress made through the civil rights and feminist movements. Under the guise of eliminating "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI), Trump has targeted civil rights offices and staff across the federal government to undo federal protections against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, or national origin in employment, education, housing, and more.

## Staff Firings to Date

It is unclear precisely how many federal employees have been fired, laid off, placed on leave, or pressured into resigning, but estimates put the total number at least **101,022** federal employees as of March 6, with more to come. A February 26 memo from the Office of Budget and Management (OMB) further directed agencies to submit, by March 13, "preparations to initiate large-scale reductions in force" to shrink staff across all agencies. Cuts to the federal workforce impact communities throughout the country; **more than 8 in 10** federal employees live outside of the Washington, D.C. area, and the federal workforce draws from the diversity of our nation. Moreover, cuts to the federal workforce will disproportionately impact the LGBTQ community with **314,000 LGBTQ federal workers** potentially impacted.

Federal workers are public servants who help provide some of the most critical programs affecting millions of people across the country. The following contains information about which agencies that serve the needs of women, children and families have been impacted and how their layoffs will impact the lives of people across the country.

Abruptly firing federal workers upends their financial security, disrupting their health care, pressuring their budgets at a time when prices are rising and the stock market is tanking, and putting them at risk of emptying their savings, losing their homes, and facing long-term unemployment. Cutting the federal workforce risks profound economic impacts in areas with large concentrations of federal workers. **Less than one-fifth** of the federal workforce is based in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia – the rest are in states across the country. In particular, California and Texas are home to 147,500 and 130,000 **federal workers**, respectively. Federal jobs also make up 6% to 7% of total employment in **certain congressional districts** in Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Texas and Washington. In addition, other aspects of local economies, from restaurants to the housing market to child care providers, rely on the federal workforce to patronize their businesses, and will be disrupted by the mass firings.

## Probationary Staff

Probationary employees are at particular risk of being fired; these are employees who enter into a **probationary period** for one year or more when they are hired, promoted,

demoted, or reassigned to a role in the federal government. Initial efforts to dismiss federal employees focused on the roughly 250,000 staff in probationary periods because of their lack of legal protections and recourse. However, probationary workers are not the only staff at risk of termination.

## Department of Education

The Department of Education has just fired 1,300 of its workers, which, in addition to the over 600 workers who were on probation or accepted separation packages earlier in the year, amount to cutting about half of its workforce. After being confirmed as Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon agreed her vision aligns with Trump's plan to abolish the agency altogether. While that would require an act of Congress, it underscores the job insecurity for the agency's roughly 4,200 employees.

At least 55 people at the Department of Education were placed on administrative leave shortly after Trump signed his Executive Order to eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs in federal agencies because they attended a diversity training course recommended by Trump's first Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

The staff cuts impacted the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), whose mission is to "ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence through vigorous enforcement of civil rights in our nation's schools," as well as the Office of General Counsel, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, and the Federal Student Aid office.

*Potential Impact: these firings will hinder the Department's ability to enforce civil rights protections regarding sexual harassment and other discrimination based on sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, and related conditions), as well as discrimination based on race, color, national origin, and disability.*

## Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

Over 100 staff have been cut from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), with plans to remove nearly all of its 1,700-person staff, pending the outcome of litigation. Gutting the CFPB will reopen the door for big banks and predatory lenders to pursue even more unfair policies that hurt consumers, like those that precipitated the financial crisis in 2009. In the last four years alone, the CFPB's actions have "resulted in over \$6.2 billion in consumer redress, \$3.2 billion in civil monetary penalties and 84 enforcement

actions."

The CFPB enforces regulations that prevent banks, lenders, and other financial institutions from engaging in predatory and discriminatory practices. For example, it enforces the [Equal Credit Opportunity Act](#), which prohibits creditors from discriminating against credit applicants based on demographics like race, sex, and marital status. In May 2022, the CFPB released an [interpretive rule](#) extending those protections to sexual orientation and gender identity. The CFPB also offers support to consumers who have experienced fraud.

The Bureau also creates rules to meet the specific needs of consumers of financial products. In December 2024, the CFPB began a [rulemaking process](#) to address the hurdles domestic violence survivors face to their credit when leaving an abusive situation. Abusers often ruin their victims' credit by making them sign financial agreements they otherwise would avoid or leveraging their victims' social security numbers to commit identity theft. These situations can create additional barriers to independence like housing and loans for survivors.

Also in December 2024, the CFPB proposed a [new rule](#) to address harmful data broker practices that misuse or abuse sensitive information, putting domestic violence survivors, low-income families, and other vulnerable communities at heightened risk. Sensitive personal data is especially dangerous for people who seek, provide, or facilitate abortion care.

*Potential Impact: these firings and potentially the elimination of the CFPB would make it easier for banks, credit card companies, for-profit colleges, and other financial institutions to take advantage of or discriminate against U.S. consumers.*

## Department of Agriculture

There is a total of 12,104 employees with less than a year of service at the Department of Agriculture (USDA) at risk of easy dismissal if the agency wants to cut staff further. Individual agencies within USDA are responsible for administering the nation's domestic nutrition assistance programs; ensuring the safety of meat, poultry, and egg products; protecting U.S. agriculture from invasive pests and diseases; administering the nation's national forests and grasslands.

[Thousands of layoffs have already happened at USDA,](#)

including [single parents and new moms](#). In addition to research, inspection, and several other roles across agencies, these staff also support the Department's food distribution programs – programs largely targeting food security and nutrition for women, children, and the elderly across the country. These programs distribute food to schools, support the National School Lunch Program, support the diets of low-income people and the elderly, and feed victims of natural disasters through partnerships with disaster relief organizations. Reducing staff managing and contributing to these programs will likely cause significant gaps in food security and nutrition.

The USDA also has been instrumental in combating the recent bird flu epidemic that has led to rising egg prices across the country, including regular prevention of disease in crops and livestock. The importance of USDA's role in addressing such an outbreak is so evident that even U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins felt compelled to [pledge](#) one billion dollars to the efforts. Shrinking the workforce would inevitably slow down the processing of such assistance.

*Potential Impact: these firings could disrupt the provision of nutrition assistance to women, children, and families with low incomes who face food insecurity; disaster relief; the nation's response to the bird flu epidemic; and food prices.*

## Department of Health and Human Services

Thousands of employees – including about [2,000 National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) and [1,300 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) staff – have already been terminated from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in the first weeks of the Trump Administration. Additionally, the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) could be cut by 50 percent, according to senior staff members at the agency and congressional aides who attended briefings by Trump officials. HHS plays a vital role in the health of the country, including programs that promote the economic wellbeing of children and families; study opportunities for better health outcomes; prevent, prepare for, and respond to public health emergencies; promote greater health care accessibility; oversee Medicare and Medicaid; and prevent discrimination in accessing those services.

About [20% of staff](#) at the Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care have been fired. Together, these offices support communities across the country, including by

providing grants to improve access to early childhood education, childhood health and wellbeing, and access to affordable child care and afterschool programs. Without staff to process applications and dispense grants, [literacy outcomes](#), school readiness, and the [worsening child care crisis](#) will continue to deteriorate – particularly for the low-income families eligible for these programs.

Cutting staff working in these vital services will directly harm the health of women, children, and families. There is already a [gender gap](#) in medical research that harms health outcomes for women. [One worker](#) studying cheaper ways to improve the U.S.'s abysmal maternal mortality rates was dismissed before her boss was even notified. Similarly, the current measles outbreak in Texas has already infected [223 people](#) since late January, and one child [has died](#) so far. There is currently [only one employee](#) of the CDC based in Texas who is tasked with handling the worst measles outbreak in Texas in decades.

*Potential Impact: these firings could disrupt our country's medical and public health preparedness for, response to, and recovery from disasters and public health emergencies, and disrupt access to Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Affordable Care Act marketplaces.*

## Internal Revenue Service

The over [6,000 staff](#) already cut at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) – in the middle of tax filing season – will mean long wait times for tax assistance, such as processing tax identification numbers, help with questions around tax returns, and resolving disputes and audits. Those issues could also likely lead families who rely on their tax refunds, particularly through credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), to wait longer for the money they're owed.

We need to expand support for families claiming these complex credits and make them easier rather than more difficult to access. The 2021 CTC expansion decreased child poverty to a record low. Similarly, EITC lifted about [5.6 million people](#) above the poverty line in 2018, including nearly 3 million children. With [23 million](#) workers and families claiming the EITC and [46 million](#) claiming the CTC every year, delays in processing tax filings and returns risk worsening the financial security of millions.

In addition, eliminating IRS staff will undermine efforts to ensure that wealthy tax evaders pay the taxes that they owe.

Funding from the Inflation Reduction Act that was dedicated to tax enforcement against high-income households resulted in the IRS collecting **\$1.3 billion**, as of last year. Fewer IRS staff means that wealthy tax cheats will continue to treat our tax laws as optional, and that fewer tax dollars are collected.

*Potential Impact: these firings would mean less support for taxpayers with low and moderate incomes and less enforcement against wealthy tax cheats, resulting in fewer tax benefits for the former, fewer taxes paid by the latter, and less revenue collected overall.*

## Department of Labor

The Trump Administration and the Department of Labor (DOL) itself have refused to release the number of staff purged under the Trump Administration, a lack of transparency particularly harmful to such a large and important department. The Department of Labor is tasked with ensuring workers' safety and rights, as well as their employers' compliance with federal labor laws. Already underfunded and understaffed, shrinking the department's capacity will likely lead to even more workplace injuries and leave workers more vulnerable to wage theft, retaliation, unlawful denial of family and medical leave or denial of rights, all issues that **disproportionately affect** women that fall under the jurisdiction of DOL.

Federal worker cuts will also exacerbate the effect of Trump's executive order revoking the 60-year-old Executive Order 11246, signed by President Johnson and expanded by later presidents, that provided civil rights protections for workers employed by federal contractors—approximately one-fifth of the U.S. labor force at the start of the Trump administration. Executive Order 11246 prohibited discrimination based on race, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and helped open the doors of opportunity by requiring contractors to undertake affirmative steps to promote equal opportunity and prevent discrimination. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) within DOL enforced Executive Order 11246 for decades before it was rescinded by President Trump. OFCCP can now only enforce civil rights protections for workers with disabilities and qualified veterans. According to a **recent memo**, DOL plans to cut OFCCP staff by 90%, reducing the office from 479 employees to 50.

Part of the Department of Labor, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) enforces federal labor safety standards. In 2023 alone it conducted more than

34,000 inspections, including inspections of employee complaints, fatalities, and programmed inspections within operations where known hazards exist, such as chemical processing and construction. Cuts to the OSHA workforce will have a direct impact on workers, putting them at risk of serious illness or injury. We've been here before. Safety enforcement under the first Trump administration declined steadily after the administration cut the number of OSHA inspectors to a then-historic low.

*Potential Impact: these firings will mean weakened enforcement of federal laws protecting workers' rights, health, and safety.*

## Department of Housing and Urban Development

At a time when housing costs are one of the **most stressful costs** for women and families across this nation, the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) plans to cut HUD staff by 50%. The **Office of Community Planning and Development**, which manages affordable housing, homelessness, and disaster recovery programs, faces the **most severe loss**.

Eliminating staff working on important pending projects to provide additional affordable housing would pause those programs indefinitely. HUD disperses **billions of dollars** in grants to thousands of partners every year, which requires sufficient staff to process that money timely.

In addition, the **leaked list of planned cuts** across HUD programs would also disproportionately impact fair housing enforcement efforts, with the Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) Office facing 76.5% staffing cuts. This would lead to even more instances of housing discrimination, including sex harassment by landlords, going unchecked.

Decreasing staff will also threaten the **5.3 million households** (74% of which are headed by women) receiving federal rental assistance. Less staff will lead to delays in inspecting properties, which will lead to longer waitlists for families with low incomes to receive rental assistance, and delays in payments to landlords and vendors, risking evictions for countless women, children, and families.

The current national housing shortage of approximately **3.7 million units** is one of **several factors** contributing to increasing housing unaffordability. The dismissal of staff at any of the Department's 64 field offices will hurt communities and undermine the agency's ability to engage



community members and respond to congressional inquiries.

*Potential Impact: these firings will lead to higher housing costs and more women, children, and families experiencing housing insecurity; uncertainty for landlords, construction firms, and vendors; delays in critical disaster aid; closing homeless shelters; and increases in housing discrimination.*

## Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration (SSA) plans to cut **7,000 workers** from its already **understaffed** offices. The Trump administration had  **canceled contracts** that allow people to register their newborns for Social Security Numbers (SSN) in hospitals after birth, before reinstating these contracts, requiring people to visit SSA offices to do so.

Decreasing staff will inevitably lead to longer wait times for the more than **one million** people with pending decisions for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability benefits, as of February, 2024. There is already a backlog of about **just under one million, eight hundred thousand pending** beneficiaries' claims.

We need more SSA staff, not less. Staffing is already at a **50-year low**, despite the record numbers of retiring Americans and the number of Social Security beneficiaries increasing by 10,000 people every day. **Women and people of color** especially rely on Social Security benefits as the foundation of their retirement security. SSA also **provides benefits to minor children** after the death of a parent, which provides critical income support. These funding cuts jeopardize the timely and accurate administration of benefits that **millions rely** on as a primary source of income, which keeps them above the poverty line. SSA provides an invaluable service to its **73 million** retired and disabled beneficiaries receiving more than \$126 billion in Social Security benefits each month and cannot afford decreased operational support.

*Potential Impact: these firings threaten the smooth operation of one of the most efficient and important government agencies, upon which millions of people rely.*