

Harvard professors sue Trump administration over funding threat tied to pro-Palestine activism



Boston, April 15 (RHC)-- Harvard University professors have filed a lawsuit against the Donald Trump administration in an attempt to block its review of nearly \$9 billion in federal contracts and grants awarded to the Ivy League school as part of a crackdown on pro-Palestine campus protests.

The lawsuit was filed in a Boston federal court by the Harvard faculty chapter of the American Association of University Professors and the national arm of the academic organization.

The lawsuit said the administration was trying to unlawfully undermine academic freedom and free speech on the school's campus.

"Threats like these are an existential 'gun to the head' for a university," the lawsuit said, according to the Harvard Crimson. It added: "They overtly seek to impose on Harvard University political views and policy preferences advanced by the Trump administration and commit the University to punishing disfavored speech."

The lawsuit was filed alongside a motion for a temporary restraining order.

It also noted that the federal government's review of the university's funding was "arbitrary or capricious" because it did not provide a reasoned explanation for threatening to withdraw the funds.

A Harvard University spokesperson confirmed to the media that the university had received a letter from a federal task force earlier this month outlining policy demands tied to nearly \$9 billion in federal funding.

The Harvard Crimson and other outlets reported that among the demands outlined in the letter by the federal task force are the elimination of Harvard's diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and a ban on masks at campus protests.

The Trump administration's demands from the university include "full cooperation" with the Department of Homeland Security, which enforces immigration policy, and federal regulators to ensure "full compliance," according to a copy of the letter obtained by the Crimson.

Harvard received the letter of demands days after the departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and the U.S. General Services Administration announced they are investigating \$8.7 billion in grants and more than \$255 million worth of contracts between Harvard, its affiliates, and the federal government, according to a news release.

Harvard President Alan Garber, after receiving the notification of the investigation last week, said if the funding were revoked, it would "halt life-saving research and imperil important scientific research and innovation."

Andrew Manuel Crespo, a professor of law at Harvard University and general counsel of the AAUP-Harvard Faculty Chapter, said in a statement that the First Amendment "does not permit government officials to use the power of their office to silence critics and suppress speech they don't like."

Several elite universities, including Harvard, have seen their federal funding threatened by Donald Trump's administration over pro-Palestinian campus protests as well as other issues such as diversity, equity and inclusion programs and transgender policies.

[SOURCE: REUTERS and NEWS AGENCIES]

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