

What the Executive Order Weaponizing Civil Rights Law Means for Your Campus

Title of Executive Order	Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (issued January 21, 2025)
What is the policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frames DEI as a violation of civil rights • Ends DEI policies in federal agencies • Charges federal agencies to “enforce our longstanding civil-rights laws and to combat illegal private-sector DEI preferences, mandates, policies, programs, and activities”
How does it affect campus communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens all academic institutions to the risk of lawsuit for policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion • Institutionalizes a hateful mischaracterization of DEI as a violation of civil rights • Reproduces white victim narrative
Who else is under attack?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially all institutions, public or private, with policies to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion • Defenders of free speech, First Amendment, and academic freedom • American democracy that requires an informed and educated citizenry
Who benefits?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarians seeking to justify their ability to dictate campus policies and classroom content • Those seeking to ensure that higher education continues to reproduce white supremacy
What can you do / How do we fight back?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid anticipatory obedience. Do not change campus policies in response to these vague threats • Publish institutional statements clarifying that addressing historical inequality does not violate civil rights • Proactively file complaints and lawsuits against First Amendment violations • The AAUP and others have filed a lawsuit to block unlawful and unconstitutional DEI executive orders • Join AAUP if you are a faculty member • If you or someone you know is adversely impacted by the EOs, share your story with lawyers at Democracy 2025, LDF, or Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law • Write an op-ed in your local paper, weekly journal, blog post, etc. to share how students, staff, and administrators are being targeted by this EO and share with CDAF@aaup.org
Additional resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRT Forward, UCLA Law • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Criteria for Faculty Evaluation, AAUP • Education Council’s analysis • African American Policy Forum's Executive Disorder Project

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