

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

Title of EO	Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (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 DEI. • Will likely result in the loss of programs that support students from varied backgrounds. • Directs faculty and administrative time away from core mission to address intrusive federal mandates.
Who else is under attack?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially all institutions, public or private, with policies to promote DEI. • Defenders of free speech, the First Amendment, and academic freedom. • Advocates for making public institutions more inclusive and responsive to the diversity of American society. • American democracy, which 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 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 your campus union. If there is no union on your campus, join the AAUP as an active or associate 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, or blog post to share how educators, 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