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LDF Media
media@naacpldf.org

LDF Responds to GAO Report on Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Layoffs, Calls for Stronger Investment in Civil Rights Enforcement

This week, a new [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) report](#) revealed that, under the current administration, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) failed to adequately enforce civil rights protections in schools while wasting millions of taxpayer dollars. According to the report, OCR dismissed nearly 90% of complaints before investigation, and its recent layoff and restructuring plans cost between \$28.5 – 38 million dollars without improving efficiency.

Legal Defense Fund (LDF) Senior Policy Counsel Hamida Labi issued the following statement:

“This congressional watchdog report confirms what we already knew to be true: over the past year, the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights has abandoned its duty to enforce our nation’s civil rights laws and ensure Black students and other students of color have access to a high-quality public education free from discrimination. Plans to lay off half the agency have proven to be an expensive distraction, wasting tens of millions of taxpayer dollars while allowing thousands of students’ discrimination complaints to go uninvestigated. The report reveals that nearly 90% of cases were dismissed before investigation — a rate that is unacceptable and denies students the justice they deserve. We are equally concerned that this may further erode public confidence and result in decreased reporting of race discrimination, harassment, and other forms of unequal treatment in schools.

“OCR must fully invest in lawful civil rights enforcement and operate with transparency. These responsibilities include ensuring Black students have equal educational opportunities, including the elimination of racial disparities in school discipline to addressing harassment and inequities in access to educational resources.”

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Founded in 1940, the [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#) is the nation’s first civil rights legal organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957, though it was founded under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall while he was at the NAACP. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute (TMI) is a division of LDF that undertakes innovative research and houses LDF’s archive. In all media attributions, please refer to us as the Legal Defense Fund or LDF (do not include NAACP) and refer to the Institute as LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute or TMI.