

Trump Admin Probes DEI Practices At Medical Schools, Fed Funding At Risk

Jul 30, 2025, 4:38 PM EDT

An HHS letter to Duke University alleging that its medical school and other components of Duke Health have engaged in “systemic racial discrimination” preferring students of color over white students indicates the Trump administration is widening its push against diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to target medical education. The Justice Department underscored the broadened push in guidance out Wednesday (July 30) that warns academic, private and public entities may lose federal funding if they have DEI practices in place that the administration views as discriminatory.

Some conservatives have been encouraging the White House to expand its probe of medical education. America First Legal (AFL) has asked the administration to launch an investigation into Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, alleging the prominent medical school’s support of DEI initiatives is illegal. Both Duke and Johns Hopkins are ranked among the top medical schools in the United States and known for their biomedical research and public health programs.

In a statement Monday (July 28), HHS demanded that Duke “cooperate with the Federal government to investigate and address serious allegations of systemic racial discrimination permeating the operations of Duke University School of Medicine and other components of Duke Health.”

According to the statement, Education Secretary Linda McMahon and HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. sent a letter to Duke outlining “expectations for a partnership-style pathway” for Duke to work with the departments “to swiftly uncover prohibited race-based discrimination in Duke Health and come into compliance with certain Federal civil rights laws.”

HHS followed up by freezing \$108 million in funding for Duke Health and the medical school, according to a *Fox News* report Tuesday (July 29). A senior administration official told Fox the cut could be permanent if Duke doesn’t comply with the White House’s demands.

“HHS is making it clear: Federal funding must support excellence -- not race -- in medical education, research, and training,” Kennedy said in the letter. “Today, Secretary McMahon and I are calling on Duke to address serious allegations of racial discrimination by forming a Merit and Civil Rights Committee to work with the Federal government to uphold civil rights and merit-based standards at Duke Health.”

A Duke spokesperson told *Inside Health Policy* the university currently has no comment on the allegations.

The statement from HHS does not outline evidence of any racial discrimination at Duke but refers to President Donald Trump's executive order instructing federal agencies to "to combat illegal private sector DEI preferences, mandates, policies, programs, and activities."

It also references a letter sent to medical schools in May informing them the Trump administration believes DEI policies may violate federal nondiscrimination laws. "All medical schools are advised to: (1) ensure that all policies, procedures, and practices are fully consistent with applicable federal civil rights laws; (2) discontinue the use of any criteria, tools, or processes that serve as substitutes for race or are intended to advance race-based decision-making; and (3) cease reliance on third-party contractors, clearinghouses, or data aggregators that engage in prohibited uses of race," that letter said.

Duke may not be the only medical school to face federal scrutiny over its diversity policies.

AFL's request for an investigation of Johns Hopkins could appeal to the administration in light of its actions regarding Duke, and to a White House that has taken actions against other organizations, such as law firms, over their DEI initiatives and worked to strip federal grants from nonprofits it sees as supporters of DEI. The Trump administration has canceled grants for researchers at universities including Harvard over its disagreements with their policies. And AFL is well-connected; it was founded by President Donald Trump's current chief of staff, Stephen Miller, after he served in the first Trump administration.

In a complaint July 17 to the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, AFL says it is asking for an investigation of Johns Hopkins "for its systemic, intentional, and ongoing discrimination within its School of Medicine on the basis of race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, and other impermissible, immutable characteristics under the pretext of 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' ('DEI') in open defiance of federal civil rights laws, controlling Supreme Court precedent, and Executive Orders issued by President Donald J. Trump."

AFL says Johns Hopkins has "embraced a discriminatory DEI regime as a core institutional mandate," alleging it is using race-based preferences in admissions, faculty hiring, residency programs and other decision-making.

"The use of DEI-based discrimination in medical education isn't just illegal, it's especially indefensible. No sector demands greater adherence to merit and objectivity than medicine, where decisions made by physicians can mean the difference between life and death," AFL wrote. "Patients place their lives in the hands of physicians, and the public must be able to rely on a healthcare system where those entrusted with medical care are selected based on objective qualifications such as academic excellence and clinical competence, not identity metrics masquerading as merit."

The complaint details Johns Hopkins statements such as that the institution "considers diversity as one of the core components of medical education" and its operation of an Office

of Diversity, Inclusion and Health Equity as evidence of discrimination. It also says Johns Hopkins' residency program at its affiliated hospital "recruits, trains, and advances residents based not solely on individual merit but on whether they meet the institution's DEI identity metrics."

Some universities, including Columbia, have reached settlements with the Trump administration when threatened with defunding, but have faced heavy backlash from their students and faculty. Others, like Harvard, are fighting funding cuts in court.

A hearing was held July 22 in Harvard University's District of Massachusetts lawsuit (Case No. 1:25-cv-11048) on the withdrawal of federal funding, including NIH grants, over the Trump administration's disputes with Harvard policies. According to *Harvard Magazine*, Judge Allison Burroughs was skeptical of the administration's arguments that revoking scientific and medical research grants was connected to the administration's allegations of antisemitism on Harvard's campus. Burroughs hasn't yet issued an order in the case. - *Jessica Karins*(jkarins@iwpnews.com)