



Listen Live



The total number of federal employees impacted by the DEI rollback is unknown, but the lawsuit suggests it could be "potentially in the thousands."



Jory Heckman | @jheckmanWFED

December 5, 2025 3:57 pm ⌚ 5 min read



Federal employees who left 'DEI' roles still fired under Trump administration purge, lawsuit claims



00:00:00

Mahri Stainnak got the call the day after President Donald Trump took office: the Office of Personnel Management's human resources office was

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Storage Preferences](#)

- Targeted Advertising
- Personalization
- Analytics

Save

Accept All

Reject All

"I said, 'Wait a minute, I'm not in diversity, equity and inclusion.' I started a new role in a job that has nothing to do with diversity, equity and inclusion.' So I felt incredibly shocked and confused," Stainnak said.

The second call came 48 hours later: Stainnak, a nonbinary person who had worked in the federal government for more than 16 years, received a reduction in force notice, as part of the Trump administration's plan to root out DEI programs across the federal government.

— [Join us May 11 for Federal News Network's Risk & Compliance Exchange as government and industry experts discuss how to navigate evolving cybersecurity mandates and accelerate secure adoption of emerging technologies.](#)

(https://federalnewsnetwork.com/cme-event/exchanges/federal-news-networks-risk-compliance-exchange-2026/?utm_source=megamenu&utm_medium=web&utm_content=upcoming_events&utm_term=events?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=in-article_promo&utm_campaign=ai_compliance&utm_content=in-articlepromo)

Stainnak is now part of a [class-action lawsuit](#)

(<https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.287297/gov.uscourts.dcd.287297.1.0.pdf>) filed this week in the D.C. District Court for the District of Columbia.

The lawsuit, led by the American Civil Liberties Union of D.C., claims the Trump administration unlawfully targeted and fired federal employees perceived to be associated with DEI work — even if their current jobs had nothing to do with it.

Mary Kuntz, an attorney at the law firm Kalijarvi, Chuzi, Newman & Fitch, P.C. who is representing the former employees, said the administration's actions "clearly" violate the Civil Service Reform Act, because employees like Stainnak were fired for previous work in DEI positions.

"You can't RIF somebody from a position they're not in," Kuntz said. "They sought to punish Mahri [Stainnak] for previous DEI work. That's a violation of the First Amendment."

Kuntz said the lawsuit claims that the administration's push to "eviscerate" DEI programs also had a disproportionate impact on people of color, women, non-binary individuals, and violates Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

"The DEI folks were working on behalf of people with disabilities, people who are non-native speakers of English. They were advocating for

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Storage Preferences](#)

- Targeted Advertising
- Personalization
- Analytics

"President Trump's directives did not merely represent a change in presidential priorities — a normal occurrence when presidential administrations change. Rather, they were targeted actions intended to punish perceived political enemies, as well as to eliminate from the federal workforce women, people of color, and those, like plaintiffs, who advocated for or were perceived as advocating for protected racial or gender groups," the complaint states.

The complaint says agencies set competitive levels for the RIFs so narrowly that federal employees were unable to compete for retention, and that those impacted by RIFs were not considered for reassignment to other jobs.

"I absolutely feel targeted on the basis of what the Trump administration believes my beliefs are, because I was not working in a diversity, equity and inclusion role in any way at the time when the new administration came in, or at the time I was placed on administrative leave," Stainnak said.

For all the Trump administration's actions to strip DEI out of the federal workforce, Kuntz said the president's executive orders don't go into any detail to define DEI.

"He characterizes them as illegal and discriminatory and various other things ... but doesn't define them," Kuntz said. "You can't decide that somebody is a different party than the party in the White House and decide to fire them on that basis."

The lawsuit states that the total number of federal employees impacted by the DEI rollback is unknown, but says news reports suggest it could be "potentially in the thousands."

The complaint states that at least 40 women or non-binary individuals, and more than 40 people of color received layoffs in connection with the Trump administration's directives.

Stainnak and their colleagues filed an appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board in March, but Kuntz said that appeal and similar cases brought before the Office of Special Counsel and agencies' Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) offices, have stalled.

— [Read more: Federal Report](#)

(<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/category/cause/federal-report/>)

In their last role, Stainnak helped agencies recruit top talent into the federal workforce. But they said the Trump administration's purge of DEI workers has pushed out individuals who worked on bipartisan projects.

Former federal employees leading the lawsuit include a former operations manager at the Department of Veterans Affairs who "helped ensure that veterans were not inhibited from accessing earned benefits due to cultural or socioeconomic barriers," a Department of Homeland Security Employee who led language competency efforts at the border to advance intelligence gathering and the safety of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers.

"By illegally targeting people based on the Trump administration's assumptions about our political beliefs, or by targeting us based on who we are, this administration actually is hurting the people who work and live in this country, because now these dedicated, hardworking federal servants are not in their jobs providing the critical services that they do, whether it's responding to emergencies like hurricanes and making sure folks have drinking water and shelter, or making sure our transportation systems are safe and timely. This action is really hurting the people who live in this country," Stainnak said.

If you would like to contact this reporter about recent changes in the federal government, please email jheckman@federalnewsnetwork.com (<mailto:jheckman@federalnewsnetwork.com>), or reach out on Signal at [jheckman.29](https://signal.me/jheckman.29)

Copyright © 2026 Federal News Network. All rights reserved. This website is not intended for users located within the European Economic Area.



This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Storage Preferences](#)

- Targeted Advertising
- Personalization
- Analytics

Wallester

Belly Fat? Do This Before Bed

Healthier Living

Before Bed Burns Belly Fat Like Crazy! Try This Recipe!

Healthier Living

Solar Panels? Prepper's Invention Takes Country by Storm

The Lost Generator

Simple Tip Relieves Years of Joint Pain and Arthritis

Healthier Living

South America

Viral Vacation Ideas

Less: 27 Budget Destinations

Viral Vacation Ideas

Getaway in Australia

Viral Vacation Ideas

Bliss: 10 Irresistible Ideas Await

Viral Vacation Ideas



UPCOMING EVENTS

How to get the most from your TSP as a federal employee [Live Q&A]

Federal News Network's CX Exchange 2026

Demystifying Your TSP (LIVE EVENT)

Ask the CIO: Defense Cyber Crime Center

Federal Executive Forum Secure Data Sharing Strategies in Government 2026 Progress & Best Practices

[More](#)

TOP STORIES

White House seeks \$17.5 billion for Golden Dome, but most funding hinges on reconciliation

BUDGET

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Storage Preferences](#)

- Targeted Advertising
- Personalization
- Analytics



News Team

Podcasts

Careers

Events

Contact Us

Advertise

Newsletters

Partners

Publications

Terms of Use Copyright/Usage Policy DMCA Notice Privacy Policy EEO Report FCC Online Public Inspection File FCC Applications Cookie Preferences

Copyright 2024 Hubbard Radio Washington DC, LLC. All rights reserved. This website is not intended for users located within the European Economic Area.

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Storage Preferences](#)

- Targeted Advertising
- Personalization
- Analytics