

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Columbia Students Fight Trump Administration Attempts to Block Free-Speech Lawsuit, Records Disclosure as Whistleblowers Now Confirm Student Claims

Students say the Trump Administration is trying to dodge disclosing its illegal efforts to block pro-Palestine speech at Columbia University—right after DOJ insiders confirm that is exactly what happened.

NEW YORK, NY, September 8, 2026 - The Trump Administration and Columbia University are now seeking to block a case in the Southern District of New York [where a court has already found](#) that both the University and the federal government may have violated the free speech rights of Columbia students advocating for Palestinian life and liberty. The move comes just days before the Trump Administration was due to provide documentary evidence of its pressure campaign against Columbia, and at the same time as [DOJ whistleblowers](#) have come forward to admit that the Trump Administration lied about the actions of Columbia students when it pulled the school's funding. The goal is clear: Columbia and Trump do not want the public to learn how they conspired to violate students' rights. On Friday, Columbia students took a firm stance against these antics.

In their recent motions, the Trump Administration and Columbia argue that a recently signed agreement means Trump won't threaten Columbia funding based on student speech in support of Palestine. False. That "agreement" tells Columbia it can choose what its written policies say, but that the Trump Administration still gets to pull school funding if Columbia violates federal directives. Those directives still tell universities like Columbia that political speech about Palestine is illegal under Title VI—which is wrong and exactly why Columbia students sued in the first place. So nothing has changed.

At the same time, Trump and Columbia have asked the Court to stay discovery. That is no coincidence. It means both Columbia and the federal government want to avoid turning over documents that Plaintiffs have good reason to believe are communications between Trump officials, Republicans in Congress, and Columbia administrators that have never before been made public and that specifically target Columbia's students for speaking out and protesting an ongoing genocide. Thus, Defendants are not just asking the Court to end the case. They are also asking the Court to stop Plaintiffs from getting the evidence of these constitutional violations.

On Friday, Columbia students told the Court that was wrong. Defendants' agreement "makes no commitment to leave Plaintiffs' protected speech alone, or to leave Columbia to decide how to interpret or apply its private university policies. All forms of coercion remain on the table."

The practical point is straightforward. If the government can still threaten Columbia, monitor Columbia's discipline, review student records, and define "compliance" and "discipline" however it wants, then the pressure campaign is not over. It has just been repackaged. Plaintiffs have asked the Court to deny Defendants' motions and allow the case to continue.

Contact

Zal Shroff, CUNY School of Law, zal.shroff@law.cuny.edu;
Amy Greer, Dratel & Lewis, agreer@dratellewis.com;
Gadeir Abbas, CAIR Legal Defense Fund, gabbas@cair.com;
Azra Taslimi, Rathod Mohamedbhai LLC, at@rmlawyers.com

Background

Khalil, et al. v. Trustees of Columbia University, et al. is a federal First Amendment lawsuit brought by Mahmoud Khalil and seven other Columbia University students to stop Columbia and the Trump Administration from targeting students for their constitutionally protected political expression and to obtain records showing alleged collaboration and coordination in that targeting.

The case is currently moving forward after the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York allowed claims against the Trump Administration and Columbia University to proceed, opening the door for Plaintiffs to seek evidence including communications between federal officials, the House Committee, and Columbia administrators.

The lawsuit challenges what Plaintiffs describe as a sustained campaign by the Trump Administration and the House Committee on Education and Workforce to use Columbia as a test case. Pressure the university with threats to hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding, humiliate it publicly, then watch as Columbia surveils, suppresses, and punishes students for protected political speech, including views critical of Israel and supportive of Palestinian life, dignity, and self-determination.

Plaintiffs allege that Columbia, once known for its commitment to free expression, capitulated to those threats in violation of students' First Amendment rights.