

Judge: Education Dept workers must be rehired

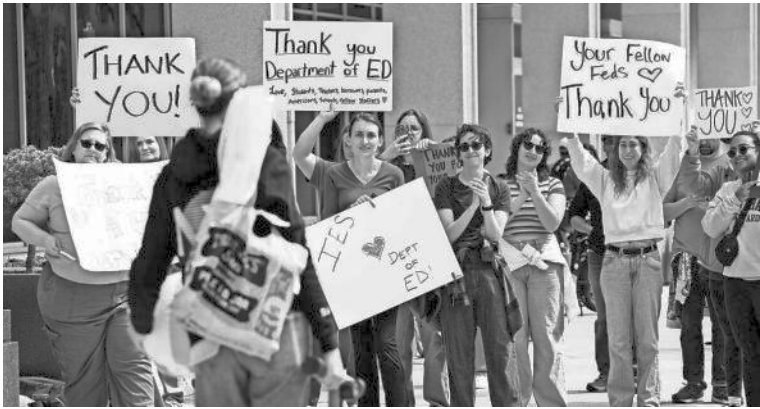
Zachary Schermele
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – A federal judge on May 22 temporarily reinstated hundreds of Education Department workers laid off by the Trump administration and blocked the president’s executive order attempting to dismantle the decades-old agency.

District Court Judge Myong J. Joun in Boston said the White House’s decision to fire more than 1,300 workers in March has prevented the federal government from effectively implementing legally required programs and services.

At the request of a coalition of Democratic attorneys general in 20 states and the District of Columbia, as well as as well as school districts and teachers’ unions who sued, Joun granted a preliminary injunction to rehire the staffers while the lawsuit plays out over whether the employees were illegally fired.

States and school districts are experiencing “delays and uncertainty in their receipt of federal educational funding, amounting in the millions, which jeopardize their missions of en-



A judge ruled that workers laid off from the U.S. Department of Education must be reinstated.
JOSH MORGAN/
USA TODAY FILE

suring an educated citizenry and providing quality education,” the judge wrote in the order.

“Such delays and uncertainty raise immediate predicaments about whether there will be sufficient staff and student programming for the 2025-2026 school year and hinder long term planning.”

Education Department spokesperson Madi Biedermann said in a statement to Reuters that the Trump administration would immediately challenge the ruling, which she said came from

“an unelected judge with a political ax to grind.”

Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, which is a plaintiff in the lawsuit, called the ruling a first step in reversing what she called a “war on knowledge.”

Though the decision is provisional, it may provide short-term relief to thousands of K-12 schools and colleges, some of which have struggled as key elements of the American education system have begun to falter since the Trump administration effectively cut

the Education Department in half. The judge also blocked an executive order signed by President Donald Trump in March aimed at taking “all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education.” Only Congress has the authority to abolish federal agencies. Though both legislative chambers are currently controlled by Republicans, the GOP would need support from Democrats to pass any bills dismantling the Education Department, which Congress created in 1979.

The executive order “goes directly against Congress’s intent in creating the Department,” ruled the judge, who was appointed by Trump’s Democratic predecessor Joe Biden.

Lawyers with the Justice Department argued the mass terminations were not an effort to shutter the agency but a lawful effort to eliminate bureaucratic bloat while fulfilling its overall statutory mission more efficiently.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon announced the mass layoffs on March 11, a week before Trump’s order calling for the department’s closure.

Contributing: Reuters

Macbride

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The university’s current lease for the Macbride Nature Recreation Area expires in the summer of 2029.

‘Unbelievably positive’ feedback from students

The report was compiled by a 10-person committee from the various university departments that use the 485-acre Macbride Nature Recreation Area (MRNA) for educational or research purposes, including UI WILD, the Iowa Raptor Project, Iowa Wildlife Camps and the School of the Wild.

Their feedback was “unbelievably positive,” the report said. Students in the College of Education said the MNRA

was “transformative for their future classrooms.” About 300 elementary education students participate in “practicum experiences” each year.

Other stakeholders said that the area is “critical” because it offers a “unique,” completely natural space for research compared to Iowa City parks such as F.W. Kent Park and Hickory Hill Parks, which have been “regrown” and “altered.” Scientists from across the globe flocked to the park to study cicadas last summer, the report said, and it is a “crucial” piece for “teaching fundamental biology principles.”

Report says need for repairs is ‘urgent’

The one-time, \$14.8 million estimate for repairs is largely centered around the aging portions of the park, including roads and facilities, which are in need of

“urgent repairs,” the report said.

The roadways haven’t been repaired in more than 65 years, according to the report, and “a significant part” of the roads need repaired, which will cost about \$6.6 million.

The report also noted that Macbride Nature Recreation Area has a “lack of reliable cell phone service” throughout the park, creating challenges for students and visitors.

The report estimates installing better cell service coverage would cost about \$800,000, plus a few thousand dollars each year for wireless service in buildings and classrooms.

The report also mentions additional needs, including a severe storm shelter, new restrooms, equipment repairs and tree removal, though no cost estimate was included.

What’s next for the Macbride

Nature Recreation Area?

The UI committee also assessed the possibility of collaborating with “community partners” that included complete or partial, shared financial responsibility. The unnamed community organizations “declined the opportunity,” the report said.

If the university does decide to end its lease, the land will be given back to the Army Corps of Engineers. The UI may be on the hook for building demolition at an approximate cost of \$500,000, the report says.

No firm timeline for a final decision was outlined in the report.

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Law

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The review boards in Iowa are a mix of decades-old panels and new ones that were created amid nationwide calls for police reform in 2020 after George Floyd’s murder by a Minneapolis police officer.

Republican lawmakers have cast the citizen review boards as fueling “unwarranted prosecutions” of law enforcement, though cities say their boards don’t have the power to unilaterally discipline police officers.

Sen. Scott Webster, R-Bettendorf, said during floor debate that the bill would show support for law enforcement and end the boards that he said violate officers’ due-process rights.

“We stand with them, we respect them and we are grateful for their willingness to put their lives on the line and protect our communities, our schools and our families,” Webster said.

The structure of the boards varies in

each community, but they generally review local law enforcement data and complaints and primarily work to improve community-police relations.

The House in April voted 81-12 to send the bill to Reynolds, with 16 Democrats joining all Republicans for the measure. The Senate in March passed it in a 37-9 vote, with three Democrats joining Republicans to support it.

What does Senate File 311 do?

The bill gained bipartisan support over its provisions giving municipal civil service employees additional due-process rights, restricting their removal or suspension to violations of the law or city policies.

Cities with more than 50,000 residents will be required to have five to seven members on their civil service commissions, which control hiring, promoting, firing and disciplining of law enforcement officers and other city employees.

Only cities large enough to have civil service commissions will be barred

from operating a citizen review board under the new law, which University Heights officials believe allows them to keep their community’s board intact. University Heights has a population of about 1,200.

Oleta Davis, president of the Iowa Fraternal Order of Police, which represents active and retired police officers, said in an April 18 statement to the Des Moines Register that the organization identified “systemic flaws in the civil service appeal process that did not afford police officers and firefighters’ due process.”

“Our bill fixed this by providing objective standards, fair procedures and impartiality in city civil service appeals,” Davis said.

But not all law enforcement organizations supported the provision banning citizen review boards.

Kellie Paschke, representing the Iowa Peace Officers Association, previously said in a statement that the group “supports changes to Iowa’s civil service laws that ensure due process for law enforcement officers.” It was registered as

undecided on the bill, though, because of the citizen review board restrictions.

Democratic lawmakers’ support faltered over citizen review board restrictions

Several Democratic lawmakers said they backed the new protections for civil service employees, but shared heartburn over the effort to block citizen review boards that were formed with local support.

Rep. Mary Madison, D-West Des Moines, who voted against the bill, said during House debate that the citizen review board restrictions tainted an overall decent bill.

“You can’t just snuff out the voice of people living in the community to ask questions, to know how a situation developed and how the outcome affects them,” Madison said.

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Grants

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news release. They include:

- Creating a new continuum of care grant program to provide grants of \$300,000 over three years to preschools and licensed child care providers to offer all-day care for 4-year-olds.

- Establishing a Statewide Child Care Solutions Fund that matches donations from businesses to boost child care workers’ wages.

- And extending a pilot program that makes child care workers eligible for state child care assistance funding, even if they exceed the program’s income limits.

“When individuals, businesses and government all work together to solve a problem, Iowans benefit. Nowhere is this more evident than in child care,” Reynolds said in a statement. “Programs like the Child Care Assistance pilot and the Statewide Solutions Fund will continue to increase our child care workforce and capacity. And the Early Childhood Continuum of Care grant will help give working parents what they need — a full day continuum of care for their children.”

Several of the initiatives Reynolds announced Tuesday were in her bill to incentivize partnerships between preschools and child care providers. The legislation passed the Iowa Senate April 23, but it never received a vote in the House.

Democrats had criticized the bill for redirecting existing funding that went to Early Childhood Iowa programs instead of providing new money for child care and preschool programs.

Grants would incentivize preschool and child care partnerships for all-day care

The continuum of care grants will be available to licensed child care centers and participants in Iowa’s statewide voluntary preschool program.

The grants are worth up to \$100,000 per year for three years.

An online request for proposal page said “the source of funding is a combination of state and federal funding sources.”

“This first-of-its-kind grant opportunity supports partnerships between high-quality preschool and child care programs, providing a full day of care that meets the needs of children and working families,” Iowa Department of

Education Director McKenzie Snow said in a statement. “We know that about 90 percent of a child’s brain develops by age 5, and Iowa’s new Continuum of Care grant will expand family access to high-quality early childhood options that lay the foundation for learner success in school and beyond.”

Statewide fund seeks donations to boost child care workers’ wages

Reynolds is seeking donations from businesses and individuals for a new Statewide Child Care Solutions Fund, which would provide money to hire new child care workers.

The program would build on a 2024 pilot program that created regional child care solutions funds in several counties around the state.

Reynolds cited a study by the Common Sense Institute of Iowa that examined the pilot program and determined a statewide fund could add 11,000 new child care slots around the state, create 8,000 jobs around Iowa and allow 5,000 more women to enter the workforce.

Restricted donations would go towards the local fund in the area specified by the donor while the state will provide a 2-to-1 match for unrestricted donations.

A spokesperson for Reynolds could not immediately answer questions about the cost of the state match or how it would be funded.

Reynolds extends pilot program letting child care workers access child care assistance

Reynolds will also extend a pilot program begun in 2023 that makes all child care workers eligible for child care assistance, regardless of their income level, to try to keep more child care workers in the workforce.

Iowa’s child care assistance program subsidizes the cost of child care for low-income families.

The pilot program currently serves 900 families and 1,500 children, according to the state’s news release.

A spokesperson for Reynolds did not immediately answer questions about how Reynolds would fund the extension of the pilot program.

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