

DOJ Accuses UCLA of Civil Rights Violation Over Handling of Antisemitism Claims

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The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has formally accused the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), of violating federal civil rights law in its response to an antisemitic campus protest earlier this year. The notice, issued Tuesday, comes on the same day UCLA announced a \$6.45 million settlement with Jewish students who filed a lawsuit alleging the university failed to protect them from discrimination during pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

According to the DOJ's letter, UCLA exhibited "deliberate indifference" to a hostile environment targeting Jewish and Israeli students, thus violating both the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal funding. The department further noted that it continues to investigate similar issues across the broader University of California (UC) system.

The DOJ notice did not address the financial settlement, which allocates funds to the plaintiffs as well as Jewish community and advocacy organizations. The agreement includes specific provisions to prevent the exclusion of Jewish students or staff from campus areas or academic opportunities based on their religious beliefs regarding the state of Israel. The plaintiffs claimed that pro-Palestinian protesters had physically blocked them from accessing parts of the UCLA campus, effectively discriminating against them.

Under the DOJ directive, UCLA must respond by August 5 to begin negotiating a voluntary resolution agreement. Failure to do so could lead to legal action. Federal officials have signaled they are prepared to file a civil rights complaint in U.S. district court by September 2 if they determine that a resolution cannot be reasonably reached.

Attorney General Pamela Bondi strongly criticized UCLA's conduct, stating, "Our investigation into the University of California system has found concerning evidence of systemic anti-Semitism at UCLA that demands severe accountability from the institution." She added, "This disgusting breach of civil rights against students will not stand: DOJ will force UCLA to pay a heavy price for putting Jewish Americans at risk and continue our ongoing investigations into other campuses in the UC system."

This action by the DOJ underscores growing federal scrutiny over how universities manage politically charged protests, particularly as campuses across the country have become flashpoints for conflict surrounding Israel and Palestine. The situation at UCLA may now serve as a precedent for how institutions are expected to balance free expression with the responsibility to protect students from religious and ethnic discrimination.