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Former DOJ Officials Sue Over Terminations During Trump's Second Term

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Three former senior officials at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) have filed a lawsuit claiming they were wrongfully dismissed, alleging political motivation behind their firings. The lawsuit, filed in federal court, could have major implications for civil service protections and the perceived independence of the DOJ.

Michael Gordon, who led several high-profile prosecutions related to the January 6 Capitol riot, was among the officials removed. Despite receiving top marks in a performance review just days before, Gordon was abruptly terminated in June. He claims his removal was not based on performance, but because of his role in prosecuting individuals closely tied to the events of January 6. “I didn’t lose my job for breaking the law. I lost it for enforcing it,” Gordon said in a public statement.

The two other plaintiffs are Patricia Hartman, a former public affairs officer, and Joseph Tirrell, the former director of the DOJ’s ethics office. All three argue their dismissals were part of a wider effort to remove career staff perceived to be aligned with the previous administration’s investigations into Trump and his allies.

According to internal sources, more than 35 DOJ staffers who were involved in investigations led by Special Counsel Jack Smith have been removed since January 2025. Those cases involved the alleged mishandling of classified documents and the coordination of efforts to overturn the 2020 election. In total, over 200 DOJ employees have reportedly been dismissed or reassigned since Trump retook office.

Critics argue that these terminations reflect a broader political purge aimed at undermining the impartiality of federal law enforcement. The lawsuit names Attorney General Pam Bondi as a key figure behind what has been described as a “weaponization working group” within the DOJ, allegedly established to target individuals deemed insufficiently loyal.

A former DOJ attorney with nearly two decades of service, recently resigned and is now helping others challenge what she calls “retaliatory and political terminations.” She described a climate of fear within the

department, where career officials are increasingly unsure of their job security.

Legal scholars have noted the potential consequences if the courts side with the plaintiffs. A ruling in their favor could reassert the limits of executive power over civil servants, while a ruling against them may signal a weakening of long-standing protections meant to preserve the DOJ's nonpartisan function.