

UCLA Faces \$1 Billion Civil Rights Settlement Demand

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LOS ANGELES – The Trump administration is seeking a \$1 billion settlement from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) over alleged civil rights violations linked to antisemitism and affirmative action policies, according to a White House official.

The move comes weeks after the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division accused UCLA of breaching the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI

of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The department found the university acted with “deliberate indifference” in creating a hostile environment for Jewish and Israeli students.

UCLA is the first public university to face a sweeping federal funding freeze under such allegations. The Trump administration has applied similar measures to several elite private universities, striking settlements with Brown University for \$50 million and Columbia University for \$221 million. Ongoing negotiations with Harvard University could lead to even higher penalties.

The White House official speaking on condition of anonymity declined to provide further details of the demands. UCLA confirmed this week that \$584 million in federal grants had already been suspended.

The civil rights investigation was partly prompted by UCLA’s handling of 2024 protests over the Israel Hamas war. One incident saw counterprotesters attacking an encampment, throwing objects and using pepper spray. More than a dozen people were injured before police intervened. The following day over 200 protesters were arrested after defying orders to leave. Jewish students later reported that demonstrators had blocked their access to classes.

University of California President James B Milliken said Friday that the institution had just received a Department of Justice document outlining the allegations and would review it. He warned the proposed \$1 billion settlement would devastate the system, which is widely regarded as one of the nation’s top public higher education networks.

California Governor Gavin Newsom accused the Trump administration of attempting to suppress academic freedom. He has threatened us through extortion with a billion dollar fine unless we do his bidding, Newsom said rejecting comparisons to institutions that have reached earlier settlements.

Peter McDonough, vice president and general counsel for the American Council on Education, called the demand blatantly political, citing tensions between the Trump administration and California’s Democratic leadership.

The Trump administration has consistently linked federal funding to reforms at universities accused of antisemitism or discriminatory diversity equity and inclusion (DEI) practices.

Columbia University recently agreed to a \$200 million settlement to resolve similar allegations, regaining more than \$400 million in research funding.

Harvard University is also in talks with the White House over a larger settlement, even as it fights in court to reverse a federal research funding freeze.

UCLA has already settled a related lawsuit agreeing to pay \$6 million to three Jewish students and a Jewish professor. The suit alleged the university failed to protect its rights during the 2024 protests, allowing demonstrators to block access to classes and facilities.

Although UCLA initially argued it bore no legal responsibility, US District Judge Mark Scarsi issued a preliminary injunction requiring the university to devise a plan to safeguard Jewish students.

Under that settlement, UCLA will contribute \$2.3 million to eight organizations combating antisemitism and supporting Jewish students. Chancellor Julio Frenk, whose family has historical ties to Holocaust survivors, has also launched initiatives to address antisemitism and anti Israel bias on campus. UCLA's leadership has expressed willingness to engage in good faith dialogue with federal authorities. The outcome of negotiations could have far-reaching implications for public universities nationwide, particularly those reliant on federal research grants.