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## Federal Government Freezes \$108 Million in Research Funds to Duke University Amid Affirmative Action Probe

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The Trump administration has suspended \$108 million in federal research funding to Duke University following accusations that the institution engaged in racial discrimination through affirmative action policies. The action comes as part of a broader federal effort to scrutinize

and curtail diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices that the administration contends are discriminatory.

According to a source familiar with the matter, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) halted the funding to the private university based in North Carolina. The decision followed a joint letter sent earlier this week by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Education, which alleged that Duke engaged in racially preferential treatment in areas including admissions, hiring, and scholarships.

The letter, signed by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Education Secretary Linda McMahon, described the alleged behavior as “vile racism” and warned that if such practices are confirmed, Duke may be deemed ineligible for any future financial relationship with the federal government. The letter did not cite specific examples but asserted that race-based advantages at Duke’s medical school and health system, if true, are grounds for a severe federal response.

The government’s directive includes an immediate end to any race-based policies within Duke’s health system that provide “benefits or advantages” based on race. The letter also proposed the formation of a new Merit and Civil Rights Committee, to be appointed by Duke’s board of trustees and approved by federal agencies. This committee would be responsible for investigating and dismantling any remaining racial preferences at the university. If compliance is not achieved within six months, the administration will warn of further legal action.

In a separate move, the Department of Education opened an investigation into the Duke Law Journal over concerns that the journal’s editorial selection process unfairly favored candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. This probe adds to the growing list of federal actions targeting elite academic institutions accused of embedding DEI policies into core operations.

Duke University has not issued a public comment on the matter.

The funding freeze poses a significant financial challenge for Duke, which reported spending \$1.5 billion on research last year, nearly 60% of which came from federal sources. The timing adds further strain, as the university recently announced that nearly 600 employees had accepted voluntary buyouts and that additional layoffs are expected.

University officials attributed the cutbacks to ongoing uncertainty over federal funding and recent increases in federal endowment taxes.

The Trump administration's actions are part of a broader campaign aimed at reining in what it characterizes as ideological bias in higher education. The approach includes leveraging federal research funds to compel universities to revise internal policies. This strategy has already resulted in agreements such as the \$200 million settlement with Columbia University, which included sweeping changes to the school's admissions, hiring practices, and student disciplinary procedures. Administration officials have called Columbia's deal a model for future negotiations with other universities under scrutiny, including Harvard University.

As the administration intensifies its focus on race-based policies in academia, universities face growing pressure to reassess longstanding DEI frameworks or risk significant federal consequences.