

Justice Department fires multiple immigration judges amid case backlog

A union representing the judges said it “makes no sense” to make cuts to immigration courts as Trump promises to carry out mass deportations, which must go through the courts.



— Attorney General Pam Bondi holds a news conference to announce charges alleging the state of New York failed to enforce federal immigration laws. Anna Moneymaker / Getty Images

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WASHINGTON – The Justice Department fired multiple immigration judges on Friday, according to two sources familiar with the decision and a statement from one of the judges on LinkedIn. The move threatens to throw sand in the gears of an already strained immigration system as the Trump administration moves to rapidly [reshape the federal workforce](#).

The terminations were enacted by the acting director of the Executive Office for Immigration Review at the Justice Department, which oversees immigration courts.

A union representing immigration judges said that since the start of the Trump administration, more than two dozen immigration judges, managers and new hires have been fired.

Five midlevel assistant chief immigration judges and 13 candidates to become new judges received termination notices on Friday, according to the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers.

“You have a president now who campaigned on immigration and removing people from the country on the one hand. And on the other hand, he’s actually firing the very judges that have to hear these cases and make those decisions. So, it makes no sense. It’s a head scratcher,” said Matt Biggs, the president of the IFPTE.

Since President Donald Trump’s inauguration, the administration has fired at least four top managers in the Executive Office of Immigration Review as well as a fifth senior manager, the union said.

Kerry Doyle, a recently appointed immigration judge, said on LinkedIn she and others appointed by then-President Joe Biden received an email on Friday telling them they had been fired. Doyle previously served as deputy

general counsel of the Department of Homeland Security during the Biden administration.

“This firing occurred despite the fact that the Immigration Court currently has in the neighborhood of 3.5 MILLION pending cases and DOJ is asking Congress for more money to hire more people at EOIR!” [Doyle said in a statement](#) on LinkedIn, referring to the Executive Office of Immigration Review.

Doyle alleged that the “firing was political,” noting that she and colleagues who were fired had been hired during the Biden administration. NBC News cannot independently verify the claims, as the number of fired judges remains unclear.

The departments of Justice and Homeland Security did not immediately respond to requests for comment.



The decision to fire the immigration judges risks adding to a case backlog that reached record levels during each of the last three years, according to the [Congressional Research Service](#).

Record-high levels of enforcement encounters at the southwest border last year resulted in more than 1.8 million new cases being filed, according to the CRS. The new cases boosted the total immigration case backlog to 3.6 million by the end of 2024, despite an effort by the Biden administration to hire more immigration judges and decrease processing times.

“There’s bipartisan support across the board to actually hire more immigration judges. I mean, there’s a backlog of almost 4 million cases as it is, so this administration, with these firings, they’ve been very successful in increasing the backlog,” Biggs said.

The Trump administration has instead focused its efforts on hiring staff to aid in mass deportations, which Trump has promised will result in “[millions and millions](#)” of people being removed from the country.

Trump’s “border czar” Tom Homan has recruited staff from several federal agencies, including the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, to aid ICE in making immigrant arrests.

“It’s just not ICE. We had DEA, FBI, ATF, US Marshal Service, DOJ is all in,” Homan told NBC News following a mass deportation operation in Chicago in January.

The Department of Homeland Security has asked the [Internal Revenue Service](#) to target businesses believed to be hiring immigrants working illegally in the country and investigate human trafficking, per a memo by Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

NBC News [previously reported](#) the administration is considering using Defense Department funding to hire contractors that would vastly expand the scale of immigrant arrests and deportations. The new funding would go toward paying civilian-run companies to expand and staff temporary detention facilities.

The firings also come on the heels of a [series of terminations](#) at the Justice Department, which marked a departure from the typical turnover between

administrations. During previous administrations, the Justice Department has asked politically appointed U.S. attorneys to resign. But this time, the administration fired as many as 12 U.S. attorneys. The total number of U.S. attorneys impacted was not immediately clear.

Last month, the Justice Department also fired [multiple career lawyers](#) who had been involved in federal cases surrounding Trump's alleged efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and alleged mishandling of classified documents. Trump pleaded not guilty to all charges, and the [cases](#) were [dropped](#) after Trump was elected to a second term.

Trump's first few weeks in office have been marked by the mass upheaval of the federal workforce, with the administration initiating large-scale firings across the government. A federal judge gave a green light earlier this week to [Trump's mass buyout plan](#), allowing the administration to persuade millions of people to resign their positions but get paid through September. The Office of Personnel Management also [advised agency leaders](#) this week to terminate probationary employees who have been in their positions for a short period of time.

The Department of Government Efficiency, spearheaded by Elon Musk, has also led Trump's efforts to reshape the federal workforce, taking aim at the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#) and the [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#), among other departments.



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