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## HIGHER EDUCATION

# Trump cancelled millions in California research grants. Judges want to restore them



BY MIKHAIL ZINSHTEYN

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Marisa Mendoza, right, and Camila Valderrama-Martínez, left, get ready to demonstrate how they use lab equipment for their research work at Cal State San Marcos on May 6, 2025. Photo by Adriana Heldiz, CalMatters

## IN SUMMARY

The science grants are a core aspect of university operations and science development in the U.S. At the University of California alone, National Institutes of Health funding brought in \$2.6 billion last year.

Federal judges handed California researchers temporary victories in their quest to retrieve what's likely tens of millions of dollars in federal grants the Trump administration cancelled this year.

The judges issued the rulings in three cases Monday. In one case, more than 800 science research grants, [including about 430 in California](#), need to be restored after a federal Massachusetts judge ruled the Trump administration's cancellation of the grants was "illegal" as well as "arbitrary and capricious." The list could grow as the trial advances. The judge said last week that he had "never seen a record where racial discrimination was so palpable" in his 40 years on the bench.

[A similar case](#) filed by a national coalition of health researchers and graduate students affects a few dozen California research grants and hundreds of others across the country. Both cases were heard by William Young, a President Ronald Reagan appointee, and largely concern the National Institutes of Health, the world's largest public funder of biomedical research.

In his statement last week, Young [was referring](#) to the legion of cancelled grants that investigated racial health disparities and funded health research into women and the LGBTQ+ community. The cancelled grants have also included research into [dementia, aging](#), vaccines and a wide constellation of health science discovery. Congress had already allocated the funds to the National Institutes of Health and these grants were approved by committees of scientists in a highly competitive process.

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By Mikhail Zinshteyn

The agency began cancelling the grants after President Donald Trump issued several executive orders seeking to cut federal support for programs that relate to diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI. A key focus for the health science agency was expanding the pool of diverse scholars and research concerning women and minorities. Those priorities **were established** by Congress.

The cancelled grants affect not just established research scientists. The cuts include programs for graduate students whose income and education are dependent on research grants to support their work and for promising undergraduate students who receive financial stipends to work in labs and hone their research skills to eventually apply for doctoral programs. The science grants are a core aspect of university operations and science development in the U.S. At the University of California, National Institutes of Health funding **brought in \$2.6 billion last year**. Cancelled grants also **ended training programs for students** at California State University.

Several cancelled grants have **already been restored** since states sued the federal government, including a large study at UC Davis **investigating the causes of dementia**.

## When money will be returned is unknown

“It is our expectation and we believe the court’s expectation that funding will be restored,” said Joanne Adams, a spokesperson for California Attorney General Rob Bonta, who was among 16 state attorneys general to sue the Trump administration over the terminated grants.

Within hours of the ruling, lawyers for the Trump administration requested that the judge put a pause on his order for 14 days. [They also filed an appeal](#) with the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals. Young [rejected the pause request this morning](#).

This is a case “concerning health research already bought and paid for by the Congress of the United States through funds appropriated for expenditure and properly allocated during this fiscal year,” Young wrote in his rejection of the pause. “Even a day’s delay further destroys the unmistakable legislative purpose from its accomplishment.”

“We appreciate the court’s ruling,” said Stett Holbrook, a spokesperson for the University of California. “The longstanding partnership between the NIH and the University of California has allowed UC to develop breakthroughs that get us closer to curing cancer, and new technologies that can detect and combat life-threatening illnesses like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s faster than ever before.”

When researchers will receive their funding again is unclear. “My best guess is it will be after all stays and appeals are resolved,” said Shalini Goel Agarwal, [according to Axios](#). He’s special counsel at Protect Democracy and an attorney for the researchers and groups who sued the

federal government.

Extended funding delays may damage some research projects, professors wrote to the court. “Once cancelled, most research projects cannot immediately resume. Many of these projects entail longitudinal studies,” [wrote a senior research official](#) at UC San Francisco, Harold R. Collard. “When scientific studies stop in full swing, their partial results often lose validity.”

Andrew Nixon, a spokesperson for Health and Human Services, the department that includes the National Institutes of Health, said the department “stands by its decision to end funding for research that prioritized ideological agendas over scientific rigor and meaningful outcomes for the American people,” [according to Axios](#).

## **UC researchers may get science, environmental grants back**

And in a third case, a federal district court judge in California ordered the federal government to “reinstate” numerous University of California grants that were cancelled by three agencies: The National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Six UC scholars filed the suit this month after their respective grants were “terminated without explanation,” as the judge on the case, Rita F. Lin, [put it](#).

One of the plaintiffs, Dr. Neeta Thakur, “studies how genes in different

racial and ethnic groups affect lung disease” and was awarded a federal grant to study the health risks caused by wildfire smoke “in communities of color and low income communities,” the judge said.

In a preliminary injunction, Lin ordered that the [grants from those three agencies be restored](#) if they were cancelled with a termination form that used vague or generic language about the project not meeting agency priorities or for running afoul of Trump’s bans on DEI funding.

Trump administration officials “have admitted that grants were flagged for termination for researching blacklisted topics, based on keyword searches or titles,” Lin wrote.

Lin scheduled a meeting July 2 so that Trump administration lawyers can tell her what they have done to comply with the court order. Trump administration lawyers could seek an appeal with the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals to try to halt Lin’s preliminary injunction.

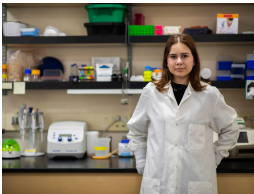
The cases in Massachusetts and California are “nicely complementary, and we have decisions in plaintiffs’ favor in both cases at just about the same time,” said Claudia Polsky, a lawyer for the six UC scholars. She’s also a law professor at UC Berkeley, but isn’t representing the university in this case.

Polsky said that cancelled grants from other agencies could also be reinstated as the trial progresses. She’s unsure how many grants would ultimately be restored by Lin’s order Monday, but it likely affects millions of dollars in research.

And in another development, California and 21 other states led by Democrats filed a lawsuit today [targeting a main tool](#) that the Trump administration has used to terminate about \$10 billion in grants across federal agencies. Federal regulations say an agency can cancel an award if it “no longer effectuates . . . agency priorities” — the language the Trump administration is using in its grant termination letters.

But [today's suit](#) argues that the federal agency behind those regulations wrote in 2020 that federal agencies “are not able to terminate grants arbitrarily.” Lawyers for the states want the judge to halt the Trump administration’s use of that regulatory clause in terminating grants.

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