

U.S. court orders NIH to restore killed grants to California researchers

Judge says district court is proper forum to protest mass grant terminations

23 SEP 2025 • 3:20 PM ET • BY JEFFREY MERVIS



Sather Tower is a landmark on the campus of the University of California Berkeley, where faculty have sued to regain research grants. SUNDRY PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

SHARE:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Reddit](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)
- [Email](#)

[LISTEN TO THIS ARTICLE](#)

University of California (UC) researchers with grants terminated by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by President Donald Trump's administration won a significant victory yesterday in federal court.

U.S. District Court Judge Rita Lin has extended to NIH and the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Transportation (DOT) her previous ruling ordering three other federal agencies to restore terminated grants because the agencies didn't follow the law in how those grants can be pulled. Lin also ruled that an August U.S. Supreme Court ruling restricting the ability of another group of scientists who had lost federal funding to seek redress did not prevent UC scientists from asking the district court to restore their grants.

However, Lin did not accept the additional claim of UC researchers with NIH and DOD grants that the government had violated their First Amendment rights by banning programs to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Only DOT, she said, explicitly cited DEI as a reason for canceling grants to UC scientists, a policy she labeled “viewpoint discrimination.”

SIGN UP FOR THE AWARD-WINNING *SCIENCEADVISER* NEWSLETTER

The latest news, commentary, and research, free to your inbox daily

SIGN UP >

The case, *Thakur v. Trump*, is one of many brought by states, universities, higher education organizations, and individual scientists protesting the actions of federal research agencies since Trump took office on 20 January. The case was initially filed on 4 June by UC researchers whose grants were terminated by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Two months later, researchers at UC Los Angeles (UCLA) were added to the suit after NSF, NIH, and the Department of Energy suspended grants worth hundreds of millions of dollars, with the Trump administration alleging UCLA was practicing antisemitism and discriminating against women athletes.

NSF reinstated its grants to UCLA immediately after Lin ruled on 12 August that her 23 June injunction also applied to the more recent suspended grants. Yesterday, Lin ordered NIH to restore the grants it had terminated. Her preliminary injunction also applies to any future terminations done via form letters that don't give specific reasons for canceling a grant.

In her 33-page opinion, Lin offered a detailed explanation of why she was not constrained by the 21 August Supreme Court ruling in *American Public Health Association (APHA) v. NIH*. In that case, the court ruled that institutions seeking to regain terminated federal research grants could only sue in the Court of Federal Claims, which handles contract disputes. Research advocates were unhappy with that decision and feared the Trump administration would view it as a green light to continue killing grants in violation of an 80-year-old law governing such mass terminations. But Lin wrote that would be a “radical” and improper interpretation of the high court's ruling, for two reasons.

The first is that UC plaintiffs “are not parties to the grant agreements,” which are instead between their institutions and the government. As a result, the researchers have no standing in the claims court, which only hears cases brought by parties to the contract.

Lin was also deeply troubled by what she considers the government's disregard for the fact that the claims court does not handle suits involving the First Amendment. “The government's position,” she wrote, “is that it could flagrantly violate the rights of researchers—even terminating federal funding to all Black researchers, or every researcher with an Asian last name—and the researchers would have nowhere to sue to undo those wrongs.”

“The Supreme Court did not adopt an approach that ‘leaves the plaintiffs without any prospect of relief,’” Lin wrote, citing language used in the *APHA* decision by Associate Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Instead, Lin noted, “the district courts are the only forum where the UC researchers could defend their constitutional and statutory rights, and ... this court will not shut its doors to them.”

doi: 10.1126/science.z2fo5d5

RELEVANT TAGS:

SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

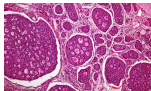


Jeffrey Mervis ✉

Author

Jeff Mervis tries to explain how government works to readers of *Science*.

MORE FROM NEWS



1 JAN 2026

Is blood-cleansing method faces its first test as cancer vaccine

BY MITCH LESLIE



30 DEC 2025

After legal deal, NIH to review grant proposals frozen, denied, or withdrawn because of Trump directives

BY PHIE JACOBS



30 DEC 2025

Is 'open science' delivering benefits? Major study finds proof is sparse

BY JEFFREY BRAINARD

[VIEW MORE >](#)

Got a tip for Science's news department?

[CONNECT >](#)

Sign up for ScienceAdviser

Get Science's award-winning newsletter with the latest news, commentary, and research, free to your inbox daily.

[SUBSCRIBE >](#)

SCIENCEINSIDER ⓘ



30 DEC 2025 | BY PHIE JACOBS

After legal deal, NIH to review grant proposals frozen, denied, or withdrawn because of Trump directives



30 DEC 2025 | BY JEFFREY BRAINARD

Is 'open science' delivering benefits? Major study finds proof is sparse



29 DEC 2025 | BY JOCELYN KAISER

Firing of neuroscience institute chief adds to NIH's leadership vacuum



29 DEC 2025 | BY JEFFREY MERVIS

The National Science Foundation just had a big reorganization. Here are five things to know

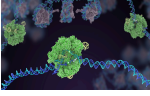
[VIEW MORE >](#)

SIFTER



4 DEC 2025 | BY ALESSIO COZZOLINO

[This frog likes to feast on murder hornets](#)



10 NOV 2025 | BY JOCELYN KAISER

[Gene editing cuts blood cholesterol levels in small study](#)



4 NOV 2025 | BY CELINA ZHAO

[Sex lives of dinos are written in their fractured bones](#)



29 OCT 2025 | BY TAYLOR MITCHELL BROWN

[Earliest crocodile ancestor unearthed in Egypt](#)

[VIEW MORE >](#)

RECOMMENDED



22 AUG 2025 | BY MEREDITH WADMAN, JOHN TRAVIS

[Supreme Court upholds Trump cancellation of NIH grants](#)



16 JUN 2025 | BY SARA REARDON

[Judge orders NIH to restore hundreds of grants cut under Trump](#)

IN DEPTH | AUGUST 2025

[Supreme Court quashes restoration of NIH grants](#)

NEWS & ANALYSIS | MAY 2011

[NIH Wins in Appeals Court, But Legal Battle Continues](#)

SPONSORED **WEBINAR** | SCIENCE AND LIFE | 18 DEC 2025

[Building a global community for rare disease: Accelerating treatments, access, and collaboration](#)

Science

Science
Advances

Science
Immunology

Science
Robotics

Science
Signaling

Science
Translational
Medicine

FOLLOW US



NEWS

[All News](#)

[ScienceInsider](#)

[News Features](#)

[Subscribe to News from Science](#)

[News from Science FAQ](#)

[About News from Science](#)

[Donate to News](#)

CAREERS

[Careers Articles](#)

[Find Jobs](#)

[Employer Hubs](#)

COMMENTARY

[Opinion](#)

[Analysis](#)

[Blogs](#)

JOURNALS

[Science](#)

[Science Advances](#)

[Science Immunology](#)

[Science Robotics](#)

[Science Signaling](#)

[Science Translational Medicine](#)

[Science Partner Journals](#)

AUTHORS & REVIEWERS

[Information for Authors](#)

[Information for Reviewers](#)

LIBRARIANS

[Manage Your Institutional Subscription](#)

[Library Admin Portal](#)

[Request a Quote](#)

[Librarian FAQs](#)

ADVERTISERS

[Advertising Kits](#)

[Custom Publishing Info](#)

[Post a Job](#)

RELATED SITES

[AAAS.org](#)

[AAAS Communities](#)

[EurekAlert!](#)

[Science in the Classroom](#)

ABOUT US

[Leadership](#)

[Work at AAAS](#)

[Prizes and Awards](#)

HELP

[FAQs](#)

[Access and Subscriptions](#)

[Order a Single Issue](#)

[Reprints and Permissions](#)

[TOC Alerts and RSS Feeds](#)

[Contact Us](#)

© 2026 American Association for the Advancement of Science. All rights reserved. AAAS is a partner of HINARI, AGORA, OARE, CHORUS, CLOCKSS, CrossRef and COUNTER.

[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Cookie Preferences](#) | [Accessibility](#)