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CALIFORNIA

Trump court action accuses UCLA of trying to 'evade responsibility' for alleged antisemitism



A person throws a water bottle at a pro-Palestinian encampment at UCLA last spring. (Wally Skalij / Los Angeles)

**By Jaweed Kaleem**Staff Writer | [Follow](#)

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- The Department of Justice has filed court documents supporting Jewish students in their ongoing lawsuit against

UCLA alleging antisemitism.

- The suit alleges the university enabled antisemitic actions during a pro-Palestinian campus encampment last spring.
- UCLA said it has an “unwavering goal of extinguishing antisemitism” on campus.

For more than seven months, UCLA has battled in federal court against [allegations by Jewish students](#) and a faculty member that the university enabled antisemitic actions during a pro-Palestinian campus encampment last spring.

In court filings, lawyers on both sides argued about whether actions in the encampment — which included Jewish student leaders — were antisemitic for blocking pro-Israel or Zionist individuals from using walkways by the camp. Both sides have pointed fingers about who was responsible for the encampment. Was it the university, which did not immediately take it down and whose staff helped reinforce it with metal barriers? Or the protesters who took over a small slice of campus?

On Monday, the Trump administration waded into the conflict when the Department of Justice [filed court documents](#) supporting the right of the students and faculty to sue for discrimination and accusing UCLA of trying to “evade responsibility” for alleged antisemitism.

The Department of Justice said the move is the work of a new multiagency federal task force on combating antisemitism. The group previously said it [planned to visit](#) UCLA, USC and eight other U.S. campuses. No dates have been announced.

“The President, Attorney General Pam Bondi, and the task force know that every student must be free to attend school without being discriminated against on the basis of their race, religion or national origin,” said task force member Leo Terrel, senior counsel to the assistant attorney general for civil rights. “The Department of Justice is working to combat antisemitism using all of the tools at our disposal.”

Mark Rienzi, president of Becket Fund, a nonprofit that is representing the UCLA Jewish plaintiffs, said in a statement that the Trump administration has “thrown down the gauntlet: If university administrators aid and abet mistreatment of Jews, they will pay the price. This is a wake-up call for every university that allows antisemitic hatred to fester unchecked.”

In response to the Department of Justice, a UCLA spokesperson said the university was “committed to eradicating antisemitism.”

“Chancellor Julio Frenk, who joined UCLA in January, has a strong track record of combating antisemitism and is actively at work to help UCLA achieve our goal of fostering an environment where all members of our community are able to live, work, and learn, freely and peacefully,” Mary Osako, vice chancellor for communications, said in a statement. The university has launched the “Initiative to Combat Antisemitism” to address “our shared, unwavering goal of extinguishing antisemitism.”



CALIFORNIA

Judge orders UCLA to ensure equal campus access to Jewish students after pro-Palestinian protests

Aug. 13, 2024

The Trump administration’s decision comes as the University of California, California State University, USC and other California colleges face an onslaught of federal investigations or warnings — from the Department of Justice, the Department of Education and other agencies — over allegations that they have mistreated Jewish students and employees.

The administration has threatened to revoke federal funding, including major health and science research grants, from universities that do not, in its view, comply with federal antidiscrimination law. This month, federal authorities [cancelled \\$400 million](#)

[in grants](#) to Columbia University, accusing it of mishandling pro-Palestinian protests and ignoring alleged incidents of antisemitism.

President Trump has also called for the deportation of foreign student protesters whom he accuses of being “ Hamas sympathizers.” Federal authorities have arrested at least two Columbia University foreign students and attempted to arrest another who fled to Canada.

Critics accuse the White House of weaponizing concerns over antisemitism to attack campus free speech and say the administration is inaccurately painting pro-Palestinian protests as antisemitic. They point out that while the White House pays deep attention to Jewish campus communities, it has had little to say about other religious and racial groups, including Muslims and Arab Americans, who have also reported increases in campus hate incidents in the wake of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, which triggered Israel’s war in Gaza.

On Tuesday, dozens of Jewish UCLA faculty members sent a letter to the university’s administration calling on leaders to resist “any attempt by government officials to harm pro-Palestinian students, staff or faculty who run afoul of the current McCarthyite dictates of the Trump administration.”

“We are vehemently opposed to efforts by the federal government to arrest, deport, or pressure universities to discipline students, staff, or faculty at UCLA or at any university who are deemed politically unacceptable by virtue of their support of freedom for the Palestinian people,” the letter said. “We resist all calls to assist in compiling lists of those targeted for arrest, deportation, or discipline, and reject without equivocation any attempt to invoke our name to harass, expel, arrest, or deport members of our campus communities. These actions do not protect Jewish people but instead are a direct attack on democracy and freedom of speech.”

The letter came out as UC regents began three days of meetings at UCLA, where the UC system's response to a variety of federal actions — on antisemitism, on diversity initiatives and on health and science research — are on the agenda.

More than 150 students on Tuesday also held a protest outside the regents meeting, calling on the system to divest investment holdings connected to weapons companies and Israel. A student speaker from Graduate Students for Justice in Palestine accused the regents of “using Trump's threats as a pretext” to clamp down on free speech rights and anti-war actions.

Speaking of events at Columbia, the student later added: “Is UCLA next?”

The ongoing UCLA court case centers on a pro-Palestinian encampment on Royce Quad that went up April 25. It was one of the [largest and most controversial](#) of those built on college campuses across the U.S. When a [mob attacked the camp](#) on April 30, law enforcement response was delayed by hours. Police broke apart the encampment on May 1 and arrested more than 200 people.

Leading up to the encampment, dueling pro- and anti-Israel rallies took place, and a handful of videos went viral in which Jewish students said they were denied access to walk through the encampment on their way to university buildings.

Protesters and their supporters said they did not block Jewish people from walking through but were instead attempting to redirect pro-Israel and Zionist individuals to reduce conflict and clashes.

UCLA has opposed the suit, saying its encampment actions were focused on safety and de-escalating tensions, not discriminating against Jewish people. Its lawyers have pointed to major changes the UC system has made to ensure the safety of all during protests. The UC system also adopted a [zero tolerance policy](#) for any protests that break campus codes.



CALIFORNIA

Zero tolerance at UC campuses in new order banning encampments, masking, blocking paths

Aug. 19, 2024

At UCLA, authorities quickly shut down multiple encampments after the original one was cleared away and created a [new campus safety office](#). New protest rules at UCLA restrict campus areas where demonstrations could take place.

A federal judge in August issued a preliminary injunction against UCLA, ordering the university to ensure equal campus access to everyone.

“Under constitutional principles, UCLA may not allow services to some students when UCLA knows that other students are excluded on religious grounds, regardless of who engineered the exclusion,” U.S. District Judge Mark C. Scarsi wrote.

The students and faculty who sued have asked for the judge to issue a permanent injunction on the same matter.

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Jaweed Kaleem

Jaweed Kaleem is an education reporter at the Los Angeles Times, where he covers news and features on K-12 and higher education. He specializes in reporting on campus activism and culture, including issues on free speech, religion, race and politics. Kaleem previously worked for The Times as a Los Angeles-based national correspondent and a London-based foreign correspondent. Follow him on Bluesky [@jaweedkaleem.bsky.social](https://jaweedkaleem.bsky.social) and X [@jaweedkaleem](https://twitter.com/jaweedkaleem).