

## Higher Education

# Judge blocks Trump administration effort to ban foreign students at Harvard

Students are already reporting visa denials and revocations and seeking to transfer, according to a university official.

Updated today at 3:58 p.m. EDT



By [Susan Svrluga](#)

A federal judge Thursday blocked the Trump administration's attempt to bar international students from enrolling at Harvard.

U.S. District Judge Allison D. Burroughs said a temporary restraining order she issued last week must remain in place until a preliminary injunction is issued.

The judge's order, which was issued on the school's commencement day, grants Harvard a win in one of the most high-stakes battles in its ongoing war with the administration.

"Today's court decision allows the University to continue enrolling international students and scholars while the case moves forward," Jason Newton, a spokesperson for the school, said in an emailed statement. "Harvard will continue to take steps to protect the rights of our international students and scholars, members of our community who are vital to the University's academic mission and community — and whose presence here benefits our country immeasurably."

Department of Homeland Security Secretary [Kristi L. Noem](#) said, "Harvard's refusal to comply with SEVP [Student and Exchange Visitor Program] oversight was the latest evidence that it disdains the American people and takes for granted U.S. taxpayer benefits."

After the department's letter to Harvard, she said in a written statement, "The school attempted to claim it now wishes to comply with SEVP standards. We continue to reject Harvard's repeated pattern of endangering its students and spreading American hate — it must change its ways in order to participate in American programs."

Harvard had asked Burroughs to block Trump administration efforts to prevent the school from enrolling international students, arguing that the government's actions would cause irreparable harm.

Abigail Jackson, a White House spokeswoman, said, "The safety of American students is at risk because Harvard University has failed to maintain a campus environment free from violence and anti-Semitism. The Trump Administration — not liberal, unelected judges — has final say over whether or not universities receive SEVP certification. We are confident in the legality of our actions."

The administration's threat to deny international students enrollment had already caused profound fear and confusion, Maureen Martin, the school's director of immigration services, wrote in a court document filed Wednesday. Students are already seeking to transfer and defer enrollment and are reporting visa denials and revocations, she wrote. And the impact was not limited to foreign students, according to Martin. "At least three currently enrolled domestic students have expressed serious interest in transferring rather than attend an educational institution without international students," Martin wrote.

Last week, Homeland Security said it had revoked the school's Student and Exchange Visitor Program certification, which allows universities to enroll foreign students, alleging that Harvard allowed "anti-American, pro-terrorist" foreigners "to harass and physically assault individuals ... and obstruct its once-venerable learning environment."

It gave the school 72 hours to respond to questions to enroll international students for the next school year.

On Wednesday, DHS officials appeared to backpedal, sending a letter to Harvard that stated the SEVP's "intent to withdraw" the school's certification for what it termed Harvard's failure to comply with federal regulations, and gave the school 30 days to respond to the notice.

"Failure to respond to this notice within the time allotted will result in the withdrawal of your school's certification" and bar an appeal, according to the letter.

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## Tracking lawsuits challenging Trump's executive orders and actions

# President Donald Trump is facing about 250 lawsuits over his executive orders. We're tracking some

of the Trump administration's biggest actions being challenged in court.

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The Ivy League school is locked in a rapidly escalating fight with the federal government, as Trump administration officials slash research funding, launch investigations and take other steps in recent weeks in an effort to force Harvard to comply with its directives. The Trump administration has accused the school of not doing enough to combat antisemitism on campus, among other criticisms, while university leaders have called the actions retaliation for its refusal to surrender its academic independence.

In a letter sent to Harvard last week, DHS said the school's SEVP certification was revoked because of Harvard's "refusal to comply with multiple requests to provide [DHS] pertinent information while perpetuating an unsafe campus environment that is hostile to Jewish students, promotes pro-Hamas sympathies, and employs racist 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' policies." Harvard contends that it complied with requests for information but was told that those responses were insufficient.

Noem also said the university was working with the Chinese Communist Party. She gave the school three days to turn over more information about international students, including disciplinary records and video of any such students engaging in illegal activity, violence, threats or protests over the past five years.

Noem made clear that her actions were intended as a warning to other universities, saying May 22 in a post on X: "It is a privilege, not a right, for universities to enroll foreign students and benefit from their higher tuition payments to help pad their multibillion-dollar endowments. Harvard had plenty of opportunity to do the right thing. It refused."

Harvard's president, Alan Garber, said in a letter to the campus community last week that the SEVP revocation was another retaliatory act for the school's refusal to "submit to the federal government's illegal assertion of control over our curriculum, our faculty, and our student body."

The hearing in U.S. District Court in Massachusetts unfolded Thursday as graduates and families celebrated commencement on Harvard's campus nearby.

If allowed to go forward, the revocation would force more than 7,000 students and scholars to transfer to another school or risk losing their visa status. Thousands expected to arrive for summer and fall terms would not be allowed to enter the country.

In court documents, university officials said the action would throw laboratories, classrooms, and teaching hospitals dependent on international students and scholars into disarray, and that emergency relief was needed. Nearly half of Harvard Kennedy School of Government's students are international.

"The effects on Harvard's students — all of its students — will be devastating," attorneys argued in court documents. "Without its international students, Harvard is not Harvard."

### **What readers are saying**

The comments overwhelmingly criticize the Trump administration's attempt to bar international students from enrolling at Harvard, viewing it as a petty, xenophobic, and authoritarian move. Many commenters express pride in Harvard for standing up to what they see as tyranny and... [Show more](#)

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