

The Destruction of DOJ's Civil Rights Division: Why it Matters

December 9, 2025

For decades, the non-partisan work of the Civil Rights Division at the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) has protected all Americans—especially the most vulnerable—from unfair treatment and unequal opportunities. As former attorneys and staff, we enforced our nation's civil rights laws. We stopped illegal discrimination in housing and the workplace. We ensured children could attend accessible and integrated schools while protecting them from abuse at the hands of police or the juvenile justice system. We fought against the mistreatment of people with disabilities and protected the rights of incarcerated adults. And we defended the right of every eligible person to vote.

Many of us dedicated ourselves to this crucial work for years—some for decades—under both Democratic and Republican administrations. Every election brought changes, but the fundamental mission of our work remained the same. That's why most of us planned to stay at the Division following the 2024 election. But after witnessing this Administration destroy much of our work, we made the heartbreaking decision to leave—along with hundreds of colleagues, including [about 75 percent of attorneys](#). Now, we must sound the alarm about the near destruction of DOJ's once-revered crown jewel.

The Administration wants you to believe that career staff who fled the Division [“were actively in resistance mode”](#) and [“decided that they'd rather not do what their job requires them to do.”](#) That could not be further from the truth. We left because this Administration turned the Division's core mission upside down, largely abandoning its duty to protect civil rights.

The Administration achieved this goal by discarding much of the Division's most impactful work. For example, Attorney General Pam Bondi [dropped](#) a lawsuit challenging [Georgia's 2021 law that made it harder to vote](#), falsely claiming the Biden Administration had “fabricated claims of . . . voter suppression.” She [dismissed](#) another lawsuit alleging [rampant sexual abuse and harassment](#) of unaccompanied immigrant children housed at Southwest Key Programs. Once confirmed as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Harmeet Dhillon [withdrew findings reports and settlement agreements](#) that addressed unconstitutional and illegal policing in [Minneapolis](#), [Louisville](#), and [at least six other police departments](#) across the country, disregarding extensive evidence of wrongdoing. The Division's sudden absence in these communities—after years of thoroughly investigating and documenting systemic discrimination—leaves them vulnerable to further abuse.

In addition to destroying much of the Division's work, Attorney General Bondi issued a [series of memos](#) that subverted the Division's mission in favor of President Trump's political agenda. One stood out: it insinuated that DOJ attorneys were Trump's personal lawyers, an assertion that struck at the heart of the agency's independence. Bondi's

demand to us was obvious: loyalty to the President, not the Constitution or the American people.

Assistant Attorney General Dhillon focused her efforts on [“driving \[the Civil Rights Division\] in the opposite direction”](#) of its longstanding purpose. She abruptly [announced new mission statements](#) that included fighting diversity initiatives instead of race-based discrimination, investigating baseless allegations of voter fraud rather than protecting the right to vote, and dropping any mention of the Fair Housing Act, a landmark 1968 law that protects Americans from landlords’ racial discrimination and sexual harassment. She and her politically appointed team also upended how we conducted investigations. Rather than rigorously evaluating the evidence to pursue only the most egregious cases, they [demanded that we find facts to fit the Administration’s predetermined outcomes](#).

Having no use for the expertise of career staff, the Administration launched a coordinated effort to drive us out. It began with transferring four of the Division’s most senior, experienced career leaders to a newly created “Sanctuary Cities Enforcement Working Group,” where [they were assigned menial work](#). It later reassigned six career attorneys to an agency outside of DOJ and 12 more career attorneys within the Division to work on presidential priorities unrelated to their expertise. The campaign to purge staff culminated in Dhillon encouraging everyone to resign after a period of paid leave while threatening layoffs if enough staff did not accept. With the offer still pending, she [demoted many of the Division’s career managers](#), reassigning them to roles processing public information requests and internal employee complaints. Dhillon’s message was clear: no one can protect the work; you are not wanted here.

Without the seasoned career experts it pushed out, the Division’s political leadership has taken on far more litigation tasks on its own and struggled to do so competently. In one case, [a court lamented](#) that a Division letter was “challenging to unpack” because it “contain[ed] so many factual, legal, and typographical errors.” In another, a political appointee could not explain basic facts, leading [the judge to observe](#): “This exchange does not reflect the level of diligence the Court expects from any litigant—let alone the United States Department of Justice.” These types of chastisements would have been unimaginable under prior administrations and undermine the Division’s hard-won reputation for integrity.

America deserves better.

It is unsurprising that the Administration’s actions resulted in hundreds of employees fleeing the Civil Rights Division. More will follow. Dhillon continues to subject the Division’s remaining career staff to forced reassignments, arbitrary terminations, and other unjustified actions. We are grateful to our colleagues who have stayed and still seek to enforce our civil rights laws in a fair and nonpartisan manner, even as the Administration tries to destroy the Division.

The future of the Civil Rights Division is in jeopardy, and with it, the rights it protects. We hope that one day we can return the Division to its righteous work. Until then, we will continue to defend those rights and the Constitution wherever we find ourselves. We call on all Americans to join us. Demand that the Division enforce our civil rights laws and defend the Constitution's promise of equal justice for all.

Sincerely,

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