



POLITICS

Musk team's access to student loan systems raises alarm over borrowers' personal information

1 of 2 | Democratic members of Congress hold a news conference outside the Department of Education and oppose President Donald Trump's plan to abolish it. They confronted security denying them access to the building.

BY [COLLIN BINKLEY](#) AND [BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS](#)

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are pushing back against Elon Musk's [Department of Government Efficiency](#) as it turns its attention to the Education Department, with lawmakers raising concerns about DOGE's access to internal systems containing personal information on tens of millions of Americans.

In a letter to the acting education secretary, a group of Democrats is seeking to intervene as DOGE gains increasing access to student loan databases and other systems. Democrats fear it could lay the groundwork for a takeover akin to Musk's attempt to close [the U.S. Agency for International Development](#).

Democrats including California Rep. Mark Takano were turned away by security when they tried to enter the department's Washington headquarters on Friday after demanding a meeting with leaders.

"President Donald Trump has promised to abolish the Department of Education," Takano said in a news conference outside the headquarters. "He believes that he can do this through executive order, and we're here to remind him that he cannot."

The department has been in turmoil as Trump, a Republican, sets out to abolish it. The White House is considering [an executive order](#) that would tell the education secretary to slash the department as far as possible and urge Congress to fully terminate it. Dozens of employees have been [placed on paid leave](#) with little explanation, and workers from DOGE have begun scouring the department's records as they look to slash spending.

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Musk's DOGE team already has gained access to a database housing personal information on millions of students and parents with federal student loans, according to two people with knowledge of the issue. One of them, a department employee, said a DOGE representative requested the access more than a week ago.

The people spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Employees described a DOGE team of several young men that has been working out of the undersecretary's office on the seventh floor.

Staff members have been told little about the team, which has been spotted in hallways and rummaging through boxes but mostly ignores others, said Sheria Smith, president of a federal employees union that represents some of the agency's staff. "They are not interacting at all, not even cordially, with anyone who is not part of their team," Smith said.

Among the cuts sought by the DOGE team is an 80% reduction in spending on a contract to manage websites and call center technology that parents and students use for help applying for federal student aid, said two department employees, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of losing their jobs. There are two years remaining on an \$824 million contract with information technology services company Accenture for the work.

Education Department employees pushed back, telling the DOGE team that much of the work to help simplify loan applications was required by Congress, the staff members said.

Last year, after a botched rollout of a revised [FAFSA student aid form](#), the department added additional support to the call centers to help families with their applications.

A federal lawsuit filed Friday seeks to block DOGE's access to student financial aid systems, saying it violates privacy rights of millions of federal [student loan](#) borrowers. It was filed by the advocacy group Student Defense on behalf of the University of California Student Association.

It says DOGE could now have access to Social Security numbers, driver's license numbers, dates of birth and contact information for student loan borrowers. The database also houses information on the parents of dependent loan applicants, including citizenship status and income information.

The suit says it's an "enormous and unprecedented" invasion of privacy for more than 42 million people whose personal data is stored in Federal Student Aid systems.

The Education Department said DOGE is helping it return to in-person work, restoring accountability for employees and reforming the hiring process to focus on merit. It said there is "nothing inappropriate or nefarious going on."

"The DOGE employees are federal employees," the department said in a statement. "They have been sworn in, have the necessary background checks and clearances, and are focused on making the Department more cost-efficient, effective, and accountable to the taxpayers."

Rep. Bobby Scott, the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, asked a government watchdog to review data security at the Education Department and other agencies where Musk's team has gained access. His Friday letter to the Government Accountability Office called it a "constitutional emergency."

"There is now a void of oversight for a very young and inexperienced team and their leader, the world's richest man," Scott wrote.

Trump campaigned on a promise to close the department, claiming it has been infiltrated by "radicals, zealots and Marxists." He nominated professional wrestling mogul Linda McMahon to be his education secretary and quipped at a Tuesday news conference that he wants her "to put herself out of a job."

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But Trump's pledge is colliding with the reality that the department's existence and most of its spending is ordered by Congress. It's unclear if Trump could rally political support to abolish the department, which some Republicans have occasionally attempted but has never gained wide political popularity.

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