

Education Department civil rights arm received a record volume of complaints last year, new report shows

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The Education Department's civil rights arm received a record number of complaints during fiscal 2023, as the office struggles with a lean staff for investigations.

The Office for Civil Rights received 19,201 discrimination complaints — a 2 percent increase from the previous fiscal year's record high — about issues ranging from race and national origin under Title VI to sex discrimination complaints under Title IX, according to a [new 50-page report from the department](#). The office resolved 16,448 cases.

"The continued need for reminders and enforcement of these core civil rights requirements is disheartening," Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Catherine Lhamon wrote in the report. "Yet, school communities' commitments to right what had been wrong and to support their students' full and fair access to education inspire me."

Key context: The record volume of complaints — which exceeded more than any number of complaints in a single year in OCR's history — last fiscal year comes as the department now faces a flood of inquiries related to antisemitism and anti-Arab discrimination under Title VI following the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas. The department has requested additional civil rights dollars for its fiscal 2025 budget to beef up its investigations staff.

In the report, the agency emphasized its efforts to address antisemitism and shared ancestry discrimination in schools last year, including its role in developing the National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism and the policy guidance the department issued on Title VI in 2023.

The number of complaints the office has received has nearly tripled since 2009, but full time staff has dropped from 629 in 2009 to 571 in 2023, according to the report. The office onboarded 60 new staff members in fiscal year 2023.

"[W]e kept pace with the high volume, resolving 16,448 cases compared to the previous fiscal year's 16,515 cases, and achieving the third highest number of complaint resolutions in OCR history," the report said. "Simultaneously, OCR managed the increasing complexity of civil rights concerns in this caseload."

The largest portion of the civil rights office's complaints were related to discrimination because of sex (42 percent), disability (35 percent) and race and national origin (18 percent).