



CBCF EXECUTIVE ORDER TRACKER

Reforming Accreditation to Strengthen Higher Education

Executive Order #14279

POLICY UPDATE

Background

- On April 23, 2025, President Trump signed an [executive order](#) to remove DEI standards from the higher education accreditation process at federally funded institutions and establish new race- and gender-blind criteria. The order specifically cites the American Bar Association (ABA)'s Council and the Liaison Committee on Medical Education as violating the Civil Rights Act for including DEI in their accreditation processes. However, the percentages of Black students at ABA-accredited law schools and medical schools are lower than the general Black population. For example, [less than 10%](#) of students at ABA-accredited law schools identified as Black in 2022, and only [5%](#) of practicing attorneys identified as Black in 2024. Medical schools are similarly unrepresentative, with [10%](#) of first-year medical students identifying as Black in the 2023–2024 academic year, and only [5.7%](#) of physicians identifying as Black in 2023. This executive order will exacerbate these disparities by removing structural support for professional students of color.
- This order continues a wave of anti-DEI policies in higher education. In 2023, the Supreme Court [overturned affirmative action](#) and race-based admissions policies in the decisions for *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard University* and *SFFA v. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC)*. Institutions of higher education created affirmative action policies to diversify and integrate university enrollment following the civil rights movement by factoring race into admissions decisions. However, in these cases, the Court ruled that affirmative action violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment by using racial identity, a protected class, to evaluate candidates. Since the Supreme Court rulings, Harvard and UNC have seen a [20% reduction](#) in Black freshmen, which poses a serious threat to the future of Black enrollment at those institutions.

POLICY UPDATE

Current Landscape

- Ever since affirmative action was overturned, [legacy admissions](#) processes — preferential treatment based on prospective students' relationship to alumni or donors— have come under scrutiny. Critics argue that the consideration of legacy status in admissions proceedings disproportionately benefits students who have historically had highly educated and/or wealthy parents. While some predominantly white colleges have accepted students of color since the Reconstruction era, integrated learning environments were not required until the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) prohibited racial discrimination for any entities receiving federal funding. As a result, generations of Black students did not benefit from legacy admissions considerations. Public sentiment is also clear on this issue. In 2022, a Pew Research Center poll found that [75% of Americans](#) do not believe legacy status should be factored into college admissions decisions.
- On March 3, 2025, Senator Jeff Merkley introduced [S. 880](#), the Fair College Admissions for Students Act, which would end legacy admissions at colleges and universities that receive federal funding. The bill has bipartisan support but has not had significant momentum. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is currently deliberating on the bill. With the Trump administration's efforts to eliminate DEI efforts from higher education, and the lack of traction on the removal of legacy college admissions, prospective Black college students currently face barriers similar to those during the Jim Crow era.

