

# DAMAGE REPORT

The Assault on Working Women  
Under the Trump Administration,  
Including Illinois Impacts.



JANUARY 2026

January 20th marks one year of the second Trump administration. For many of us, there has been no recent 12-month period that has been marked by such direct attacks on workers' rights, women's freedoms, and even the fundamental structures of our democracy. Project 2025 went from distressing plan to frightening reality. The swift and unrelenting actions of this administration have been shocking, and the launching of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) set the tone for much to follow. DOGE is a new presidential commission operating outside of precedent and legal structures, giving inexperienced and unvetted individuals with no credentials or security clearance unbridled access to information and personal data.

Federal agencies and programs were hollowed out, dismantled, and weaponized. Hundreds of thousands of skilled public servants lost their jobs. Programs that lift up the least advantaged have been scaled back or scrapped altogether, and the cost savings and tax breaks have been passed up to the most affluent, widening the wealth gap and providing little relief to working families. [2025 was the worst year for hiring since 2020](#). The administration's assault on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility has had far-reaching consequences, laying the foundations for so much



of the damage you will read throughout the rest of this report. Additionally, the administration's immigration enforcement tactics have been nothing short of terrifying. Federal agents stormed the streets in major U.S. cities, including Chicago and its surrounding areas, causing chaos, inciting violence, and kidnapping citizens and non-citizens

alike. **Illinois has been a particular target of this administration's actions, and the most vulnerable Illinoisans have borne the brunt.**

But within the darkness there have been rays of hope. Examples of resistance, persistence, and resilience. **Those who believe in civil rights and the bedrock values of fairness and justice are not defeated, and in fact have shown defiance in the face of attacks, and have won important victories for working families in Illinois and beyond.** Women Employed (WE), along with advocates and everyday people across the country, have called and written our elected officials. WE has joined hundreds and thousands of people as we marched in the streets. WE has signed onto amicus briefs and supported partners and advocates who've filed lawsuits, and opposed nominees who would erode our rights further. And WE has helped shore up our rights where we can.

Women Employed launched a campaign, [For the Common Good](#), to keep people informed of the threats, provide actions to take, and connect them with resources to keep them protected. As part of that campaign, we've created 16 videos accompanied by deeper dive blog posts, explaining the work of key government agencies—including the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, and the National Labor Relations Board, to name a few—and the damage being done, and providing people with actions they can take to make an impact. Our videos have been viewed more than 7,500 times. We have been doing all of this in addition to the work we have always done to build the economic power of women in Illinois and beyond. In Illinois, where Women Employed is based, and across the country, we have shown that when the chips are down, we don't fold—we rise.

It is not unusual for Women Employed to disagree with, criticize, or advocate for changes, under any federal administration. However, never before in our history have we encountered such a wholesale assault on every facet of our mission, and on the structures and values that form the foundation of civil rights. **So on the one-year anniversary of this administration, Women Employed is issuing this damage report. While we cannot list all the damage done on all fronts, we spotlight the alarming actions designed and executed by this administration to harm working women nationwide, and the impacts they are having in Illinois.** We are also lifting up the ways we're fighting back, and ways that YOU can make a difference.

# THE UNDERPINNING: AN ANTI-WOMAN ADMINISTRATION

Actions taken by this administration—from attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion; to the layoffs of government workers; to funding cuts for research and social programs; and more—have either been directly aimed at, or disproportionately harmed, women. The harm has been even greater for Women of Color. Under this administration, unemployment among Black women is rising faster than for any other gender and racial group. In December, [Black women faced a staggering 7.3 percent unemployment rate—significantly higher than the 4.4 percent overall unemployment rate.](#)

Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) cuts have severely impacted grants for research, education, and programs that help women and girls, and particularly Women of Color—to the tune of [at least \\$3 billion.](#)

These cuts have been paired with the dismantling of agencies and programs that enforce civil rights laws, provide access to equal opportunities in education and work, and support the most

economically vulnerable, all of which are crucial to building women's economic power. Attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in particular have had a profound effect on working women—and have resulted in the elimination of jobs, fewer protections for sexual harassment, and growing pay inequities. Additionally, the federal departments and agencies that have seen the deepest staffing reductions are those with the highest representation of Black and Brown women, who are overrepresented in government jobs.

It's extremely alarming and dangerous to see misogyny and racism rearing their ugly heads in people holding some of the most powerful positions in our country. The damage is real, and it will take years to repair. Yet, as civil rights trailblazer, and fellow Chicagoan Ida B. Wells said, "The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them." **And true power lies with the people. We decide who our country will be. And we demand dignity, humanity, rights, justice, and equity for all.**

## LAYING OUT THE DAMAGE, AND OUR DEFIANCE

### The Campaign Against Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

President Trump and his administration have waged a campaign of disinformation and destruction against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)—calling these programs and policies "illegal" and discriminatory, and falsely claiming that they are unconstitutional. In fact, programs that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion do the opposite, ensuring that discriminatory barriers are removed so that all people are afforded equal access and opportunities for their skills, knowledge, expertise, and talents. This administration has also attacked accessibility efforts, which ensure people with disabilities are not kept from participating in society. And despite the administration's false allegations, DEI and

accessibility policies are not illegal. The civil rights laws undergirding them have not changed.

#### The Damage

➤ Through a series of **executive orders, and real or threatened lawsuits, President Trump and his administration have ended grants and programming, stripped funding from non-profit organizations, attacked institutions of higher education—** including defunding Minority Serving Institutions (MSI)— **terminated government employees, shuttered essential departments, dismantled agencies, and so much more.**

➤ **The administration's actions have had a chilling effect on DEI efforts across the economy.** For example, corporations and institutions of learning have ended their own DEI programs, stripped statements from their websites, and capitulated to the administration, even though the law has not changed. In fact, [more than 50 percent of Fortune 500 companies](#) have either rebranded their DEI programs, or removed them completely from their websites. Ironically, in bending to the administration, employers are putting themselves at greater risk of violating the anti-discrimination laws that these programs are meant to uphold. Many sources of private grant funding have disappeared. [Thousands of public and private-sector jobs related to diversity, equity, and inclusion have been eliminated.](#)

➤ **The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a legal memo in December declaring that several of the U.S. Department of Education's grant programs for MSIs and students from underrepresented backgrounds are unconstitutional.** As a result, the [DOJ added that they should discontinue those programs and redirect the funds elsewhere.](#) And, even before the DOJ issued that memo, the Department of Education had already canceled grants for MSIs, making that memo a nail in the coffin. This affects 34 institutions of higher education in Illinois alone—both 2- and 4-year colleges. That's more than any state outside of California, Texas, and New York.

## Our Defiance

➤ Advocates have seen this attack for what it is—a coordinated propaganda campaign aimed at normalizing discrimination, misogyny, and racism. And Women Employed has not stood idly by. **All the acts of defiance outlined in this report relate to this assault on the bedrock ideals and civil rights protections of our country.** Contrary to the rhetoric of this administration, we are a better country because of the

creation and protection of civil rights; and through defiance and resilience, the country is pushing back to protect those rights that were so hard fought and won.

➤ **Many of WE's core partners have lost federal funding due to these attacks, putting their very existence at risk. But those organizations are fighting back, and Women Employed is joining them.** [Chicago Women in Trades \(CWIT\) sued the Trump administration in February 2025,](#) after their federal funding—provided through a grant from the DOL's Women's Bureau (see more on page 9)—was revoked as part of the administration's assault on diversity, equity, and inclusion. In April, they won a key victory when a federal judge granted an injunction, which required the federal government to reinstate CWIT's funding, though a final decision on the lawsuit has not yet been made. In September, [Women Employed joined an amicus brief in support of CWIT,](#) and we will continue to fight alongside CWIT until they achieve victory.

➤ **Women Employed is a core campaign partner with the national *The 75 Million Project*,** led by the National Women's Law Center and the National Partnership for Women and Families. ***The 75 Million* is launching a bold call to action to resist this administration's attacks on women and building a national women's policy agenda** reflecting the needs and aspirations of the 75 million working women who drive our economy. The campaign kicked off with an open letter to working women, which was published in both the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

Check out our *For the Common Good* video and post on diversity, equity, and inclusion.



# Compromising Equal Access to Education

Every student in every community deserves access and opportunity to attain a quality education, allowing them to earn degrees with workforce value and make family-supporting wages. No one's path should be blocked based on what their families can afford, where they come from, or how they identify. Education has proven time and time again to be one of the most effective paths to economic security and vitality, ensuring those who've historically been shut out of opportunity have what they need to achieve their dreams. But the Trump administration has taken aim at education access from day one, pushing an agenda that would make education available only to the elite and those with financial means.

## The Damage: Dismantling the U.S. Department of Education (USED)

- **President Trump was able to push through his nomination of Linda McMahon, a Trump campaign donor with no education expertise, as the Secretary of Education, and she has made good on promises to dismantle the USED.** In July, they announced that most of the administration and funding of career and technical education, as well as adult education and family literacy programs, would move to the U.S. Department of Labor. In November, the USED announced that six additional major functions would be redistributed to other agencies that are not well-equipped to take on those functions.
- **Many important programs which serve students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation students, and student parents are affected by these cuts and administrative changes.** Affected programs include TRIO, GEARUP, Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).
- **These actions affect over 80 federal grant programs that are collectively responsible for nearly \$34 billion in education funding.** In Illinois, at least 11 institutions of higher education lost a

combined total of more than \$1.8 million in MSI grants, limiting their ability to serve their unique student populations.

- **Furthermore, most of the USED's Office of Civil Rights has been laid off, and seven regional offices—including Chicago's—have been shuttered.** All of this is in addition to DOGE cuts, layoffs, and reorganizing that had already decimated the USED to less than half of its needed staffing. This will impact millions of students, especially those who are low-income or Students of Color, making it harder for them to get the quality, affordable education they need.
- **The Trump administration brought a lawsuit against Illinois' Minority Teachers of Illinois (MTI) scholarship program, as well as the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois scholarship,** which sought to bring a more diverse workforce into Illinois schools with targeted financial aid. As a result of the legal attack, these scholarships can no longer focus on the racial makeup of our elementary, secondary, or post-secondary educators, despite evidence that all students benefit from this diversity.

## Our Defiance

- Across the country, states are pushing back. **In the absence of a strong USED Department of Civil Rights, several states have taken steps to ensure the civil rights protections that department had safeguarded for students are still in place in their states.** This includes drafting and passing state-level legislation.
- **The Illinois Attorney General (AG) and his counterparts in Massachusetts and New York issued guidance clarifying that the administration's "Dear Colleague Letter" demanding the dismantling of DEI in higher education does not have the force of law** and that "educational institutions should continue to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility among their student bodies."

➤ **The Illinois AG also filed 2 amicus briefs**, along with 22 other state attorneys general, **supporting the Council for Opportunity in Education’s lawsuits challenging USED’s funding cuts to the TRIO program.**

➤ **Women Employed meets regularly with federal experts**, particularly Education Counsel and Education First, **and advocates for equitable education** through virtual spaces coordinated by the Joyce Foundation and Advance Illinois. A subset of organizations, like the Partnership for College Completion, Advance Illinois, and Latino Policy Forum, **have also come together to drill down on the impact of federal actions on Illinois higher education and to coordinate messaging and actions to the broader public.**

➤ **WE worked with the statewide Coalition for Transforming Higher Education Funding to push forward legislation that would adequately, equitably, and stably fund Illinois public universities**, ensuring that institutions have sufficient funding to serve their unique student populations. We already know that our public universities are underfunded by at least \$1.4 billion. With cuts to grants to institutions, elimination of federal loans, and fear from international students, that deficit is growing, putting unsustainable pressure on already stressed institutions.

➤ **WE has submitted public comment on federal policy and rules that impact equity, data availability, and quality education** in general and has signed on to numerous national statements and letters along with hundreds of like-minded organizations across the country.

➤ **WE convenes partners from Illinois Minority Serving Institutions to strategize, share ideas and resources, and develop a support network for those programs** in the face of dismantling of DEI, elimination of their federal funding, and threats to the foundation of their programs.

➤ **Women Employed is actively leading partners across the state** with support from the National Skills Coalition **to identify untapped resources that can support adult students** trying to complete their education and is also participating in an Urban Institute project to increase supports for students in higher education.

Check out our *For the Common Good* video and post on the Department of Education—the first video we created in that campaign.



## The Damage: Changing Student Loan Programs and Increasing Debt Burdens

➤ In Illinois, more than 1.6 million people carry federal student debt. **The administration has implemented measures that change (or end completely) income-based repayment plans**, resulting in higher monthly payments. Those measures also eliminate protections for borrowers in economic hardship or unemployment. In fact, the Trump administration started garnishing the wages of student loan borrowers in default this January, the first time a portion of borrowers' paychecks has been at risk since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, when collection activity was halted.

➤ **With the reduction of Parent PLUS loans, and the elimination of the Grad PLUS loan program—both set to go into effect in July of 2026—college and graduate students will have fewer options to pay for college.** Parent PLUS loans now carry a \$20,000/year and \$65,000 lifetime max per dependent, and income-driven repayment is no longer an option. Grad PLUS loans will be eliminated entirely. Instead, graduate students will face annual loan caps of \$20,500 for “graduate” degrees, and \$50,000 for “professional” degrees. Many of the degrees in the “graduate” category, with lower loan limits, are in industries pursued by women, such as nursing, education, and social work. The Parent PLUS and graduate loan changes will make it harder for students—and especially students from low-income households, Students of Color, and women—to access the education they need to move into careers that provide higher wages and better economic and career advancement opportunities.

➤ **The administration is also trying to make changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which would make it harder for many public servants to qualify.** In particular, the USED says it will deny loan forgiveness to workers whose government or nonprofit employers engage in activities with a “substantial illegal purpose,” the definition of which is murky, and will fall not to the courts, but to the education secretary—a deeply problematic process, since she has proven to be a rubber stamp for the administration.

➤ **Many of these changes to student loans and loan repayment plans were passed as part of “The Big, Bad Bill,”** which we talk more about on pages 11-13.

## Our Defiance

➤ **In 2025, national advocates, supported by Women Employed, won an expansion of the Pell Grant program, called Workforce Pell**, which has the potential to be a gamechanger for adult learners. It expands Pell Grants to cover programs as short as 150 hours and 8 weeks in length. That could allow low-income adult learners to qualify for financial aid for programs to earn certificates and credentials that will qualify them for in-demand jobs.

➤ **WE is monitoring Illinois' preparations for Workforce Pell** and working in coalition with state agencies and other advocates to maximize access to this new stream of student financial aid.

➤ In November, **Chicago was among the cities which sued the Trump administration over proposed Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) changes, and Women Employed also submitted public comment** opposing those changes.

➤ **WE continues to work in coalition with groups advocating for equal opportunity and affordability in higher education**, including signing onto coalition letters resisting damaging changes.

➤ **WE continues to maintain and update a resource page for student borrowers** to ensure they have the most recent information to manage their student debt.

## Eliminating Worker and Consumer Protections

At every turn this administration has systematically dismantled the institutions that protect us, and eliminated the protections that allow working people to stay in their jobs, access opportunities to advance, and achieve economic power. These attacks will have the greatest impact on the working people who are most vulnerable—those in the low-paid workforce, and those who traditionally have not had access to high-quality jobs. Those people are overwhelmingly women, People of Color, LGBTQ+ workers, and workers with disabilities.

### The Damage: Destabilizing and Dismantling the Institutions That Protect Us

➤ **Illegal Firings and Unqualified Appointees:** Almost immediately upon taking office, [President Trump began firing key officials](#) at independent federal agencies and offices that protect and advance working people—moves that were completely unprecedented, and in some cases, likely illegal. This included firing two Democratic commissioners before the end of their terms, as well as the General Counsel, at the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**, likely because they would not have supported his efforts to weaponize the EEOC. He also fired the General Counsel and a Senior Board Member at the **National Labor Relations Board**

**(NLRB)**. These moves left both the EEOC and the NLRB without the quorum needed to conduct much of their business and fulfill their missions to protect American workers.

He has replaced these department and agency experts with people who lack the proper qualifications, who have records antithetical to the missions of the agencies they lead, and who have demonstrated they will rubber stamp the administration's agenda—chosen for their willingness to move the administration's anti-equity agenda forward, under the guise of fighting "reverse discrimination."

**Agencies, such as the EEOC and the NLRB—that were never meant to operate at the whim of the president or any other elected officials—are losing that independence.** That means those agencies, which are critical to protecting the rights of American workers and equal opportunity, are being weaponized to serve a political agenda that is detrimental to the needs of the people they are meant to protect.

➤ **Layoffs and Closures:** On top of these illegal firings, the administration—often through the work of the dubiously formed DOGE—[announced a series of federal layoffs and office closures](#), hollowing out many of the federal agencies that are tasked with protecting our civil rights, ensuring anti-discrimination laws are enforced, and protecting worker safety. **These include The Department of Labor (DOL), which houses the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) and Women's Bureau.**

**The administration's first attack on the Department of Labor was to the OFCCP**, which has laid the foundation for so many of the advancements women and People of Color have made in the workplace in the last 60 years. The OFCCP ensures that employment opportunities made possible by federal funding—i.e., YOUR tax dollars—should be available to all workers on a fair and

equitable basis. As one of its first acts, the administration [revoked Executive Order 11246](#), which created the office and prohibited federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation). Then, in April, the administration took it one step further and shuttered the vast majority of the OFCCP's offices, putting almost all its employees out of work.

The administration has significantly reduced staffing in the Department of Labor as a whole. **[They have also decimated staffing of the Women's Bureau—a 105-year-old division of the DOL that now has just one-third the staff they did at the beginning of 2025.](#)** President Trump and his allies have revoked funds or ended grants administered by the Women's Bureau, which are meant to increase women's representation in the trades, prevent and respond to gender-based violence and workplace harassment, and expand access to equal pay rights. This includes the grant that funded CWIT, as noted on page 4, and the Fostering Access and Racial Equity (FARE) grant, which helped women workers who are paid low wages to access benefits and know their workplace rights. In 2021, a FARE grant provided funding for the Illinois Department of Labor, which Women Employed was a lead partner on, to inform Illinoisans about their equal pay rights. Now the administration is going even further, working towards permanently eliminating the Women's Bureau in 2026, endangering the only federal agency mandated to represent the needs of wage-earning women in the public policy process.

**This administration has also reduced the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB's) staff and budget to levels so low that the agency cannot carry out its legal obligations as a watchdog for predatory companies and financial institutions.** [They announced layoffs to 90 percent of CFPB staff](#), and while a final decision is still tied up in

the courts, those staff are not currently working in their roles protecting consumers. [They have permanently dismissed 22 CFPB enforcement actions and reversed others, keeping at least \\$120 million due to be paid to consumers](#) in the pockets of the companies. And in what could have been a fatal blow, [the administration declared in November that CFPB's funding structure is "illegal,"](#) and could not be renewed. While that action was met with successful resistance (see "Our Defiance" below), if that decision had stood, the CFPB would have had to close down completely in 2026. We anticipate the administration will look for other ways to end the work of the CFPB, so we must remain vigilant.

## Our Defiance

- **WE joined civil rights and advocacy organizations across the country to oppose President Trump's alarming nominees**, including Andrea Lucas (EEOC, Brittany Panuccio (EEOC, and Lori Chavez-DeRemer (DOL Women Employed leveraged our Action Network, reaching out to our 4,000 members with concrete calls to action to resist these damaging nominees.
- WE has a long history of working with the OFCCP to open doors and break barriers for women nationwide and here in Illinois. [So, WE produced a blog post and videos](#), as part of our *For the Common Good* campaign, educating people about the importance of this agency, and the historic significance of their work. **We mobilized people to call and write their federal legislators, asking them to protect our fundamental civil rights laws and policies, restore the OFCCP, and reinstate the purpose outlined in EO 11246.** And we will keep fighting, seeking opportunities to rebuild the OFCCP, and to make sure the important work they should be doing continues even in their absence.

➤ **Illinois was one of 21 states, along with the District of Columbia, [suing the Trump administration](#) in December to prevent it from defunding the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.**

In January 2026, [a federal judge ordered that the administration cannot allow funding for the CFPB to lapse](#). As a result, the agency's acting director requested \$145 million in funding from the Federal Reserve.

continue to be misused to chip away at equity and opportunity for all.

➤ **Attacking Organized Labor:** President Trump and his allies have significantly weakened the power of the NLRB, leaving labor disputes unresolved, worker protections in limbo, and facilitating the proliferation of hostile work climates. In the wake of firing key NLRB leaders, President Trump's NLRB has issued [only 6 decisions on labor disputes in 2025](#), in comparison to 150 in 2024. In addition, the president has [eliminated collective bargaining rights](#) for more than 1 million federal workers, which is potentially illegal and which one labor historian has described as "by far the [largest single action of union-busting](#) in American history."

Check out our *For the Common Good* videos and posts on the OFCCP and the Department of Labor.



### The Damage: Eliminating Worker Protections

➤ **Weaponizing the EEOC:** Under the Trump administration, the EEOC has dramatically shifted their priorities, pivoting to the administration's agenda against diversity, equity, and inclusion. By doing so, they are implicitly condoning the very workplace harassment and discrimination they were formed to combat. The EEOC has asked the courts to dismiss race and gender discrimination and harassment cases that were initiated under the prior administration—[including all seven of its active cases concerning trans and non-binary workers](#). They have also stated that they will [not investigate complaints that are based on disparate impact](#)—meaning they relate to policies and practices that have disproportionate negative impacts on particular populations based on their color, gender, ability, etc. Under Chair Andrea Lucas, the EEOC has publicly bullied law firms that support diversity, equity, and inclusion, and accused colleges and universities, without evidence, of discriminating against white male candidates. And it is likely that, under Lucas, the EEOC's resources will

➤ **Undermining Wage and Hour and Workplace Safety:** Under President Trump, we have witnessed a dramatic drop in federal enforcement of wage and workplace safety regulations. [Wage and hour penalties have decreased 94 percent during President Trump's second term, and workplace health and safety penalties have dropped 45 percent](#)—leaving them at the lowest level in 2 decades. Working people, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet, are facing stolen wages and unsafe workplace conditions, to the benefit of corporate interests. And employers are receiving a message that the government will look the other way if they exploit or harass workers.

- **WE has continued our Know Your Rights public education**, making a point to remind people what their local and state rights are and where they can go to make complaints, even as the EEOC is weakened.
- **Women Employed actively participates in local, state, and national coalitions and working groups** to stay on top of the most important news and updates, to discuss strategies and solutions, and to ensure we keep our constituents informed and action-ready.
- **WE have stood strong against attempts to roll back worker rights in Chicago** (protecting the elimination of the subminimum wage for tipped workers) **and in Cook County** (preserving paid leave rights in municipalities and school districts).
- **We have reviewed and continue to review Illinois laws to ensure they maintain Illinoisans rights**, even as the federal government seeks to erode those rights. For example, Women Employed worked with the Illinois Department of Labor to ensure the state's Equal Pay Registration Certificate, which requires large businesses to report on pay equity, did not rely on federal filings (see more on page 15). We are working with advocates to continue to prevent policies from having a disparate impact on certain groups, especially in education and employment.
- **We have worked to protect and expand domestic workers' rights** through the Illinois Domestic Worker Coalition and the City of Chicago's Domestic Worker Portable Paid Time Off Working Group.

Check out our *For the Common Good* video and blog post about the work of the NLRB.



## Defunding the 99 Percent to Benefit the 1 Percent

This administration has shown time and again that one of their goals is to siphon resources from those who most need them in order to line pockets of the wealthy, widening already glaring wealth disparity and deepening poverty and economic insecurity. There's no single action that's made that more apparent than pushing through HR1 in July of 2025, which we call "The Big, Bad Bill." This law will reduce or eliminate many of the programs that low-income working people depend upon to remain financially afloat.

### The Damage: Passing HR1 (aka "The Big, Bad Bill")

- **Medicaid, a program that millions depend upon for their healthcare, is one victim of the cuts.** [In Illinois alone, 3.4 million people—about 25 percent of our state's population—are currently covered by Medicaid.](#) HR1 now requires able-bodied adults to work 80 hours per month until age 65 (increased from age 55 to qualify, without regard for caregiving responsibilities beyond parents of young children. And while there are carve-outs for parents of children under 14 (previously under 18), and those with disabilities, [nearly 12 million people could lose their health coverage because of this bill.](#)

➤ **In addition, the bill sought to ban Affordable Care Act (ACA) health plans from covering abortion and gender-affirming care**, which covers one in seven Americans. It included a measure to defund Planned Parenthood, which provides critical services, including pap smears, cancer screenings, and birth control. Without reproductive healthcare, the financial security and career trajectories of millions of women will be at risk.

➤ **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps millions of families put food on the table, may see billions of dollars in cuts, as well as expanded and burdensome, work requirements**. Similar to Medicaid changes, “able bodied adults” would be required to work until age 65 instead of 55 to qualify, and there are limits on the ways states can offer waivers for those requirements. The bill also forces states to take on a greater share of the cost of providing food assistance, and if they can’t, their residents will lose SNAP benefits. Reduced benefits and tightened eligibility requirements will put an estimated 360,000 Illinois residents at risk of losing their SNAP eligibility, putting their very lives, and those of their families, at risk.

➤ **There were also several changes to student loans and student debt repayment options**, which we talked more about on page 7.

## Our Defiance

➤ **WE spoke out loudly against the House version of the bill**, working with our partners to oppose this cruel legislation, mobilizing advocates and working people to contact Congress, and **helping to win concessions that lessened the impacts of some of the most damaging measures** in the Senate version that became the basis for the law. For instance, alongside other advocates, WE was able to maintain the current credit hour requirements for Pell

grants and reduce the threatened cuts to SNAP and Medicaid.

➤ Illinois is already addressing the impacts of the law that did pass. **The state hosted hearings on SNAP and Medicaid during the fall veto session. And the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) launched a federal SNAP impact tracker** to better understand the damage being done, so we can develop state-level solutions.

➤ **The ACLU filed a lawsuit against the administration, challenging the measure that defunds Planned Parenthood and other reproductive health clinics**. As a result, the administration quietly restored their funding in December.

➤ **Because of the strong work of advocates, the bill included an increase to the maximum pre-tax contribution limits for the Dependent Care Assistance Plan**. Starting in 2026, the maximum will increase from \$5,000 to \$7,500 for single individuals or married individuals filing jointly, and from \$2,500 to \$3,750 for married individuals filing separately.

➤ **Advocates were also able to win a permanent increase to the federal Child Tax Credit** to \$2,200 per child starting in 2026, for the 2025 tax year. Previously, the credit was \$2,000 per child, with a refundable portion of \$1,700.

➤ **The Illinois Child Tax Credit, which WE worked on as a member of the state coalition led by Economic Security Illinois, doubled in 2025**.

➤ **The Employer-Provided Child Care Credit, which assists businesses in offering child care to employees, was permanently increased**. The maximum credit increased from \$150,000 to \$500,000 per year and the percentage of qualified child care expenses increased from 25 percent to 40 percent. For eligible small businesses, the maximum credit increased even more, to \$600,000, and the percentage increased to 50 percent.

➤ **The bill maintained the maximum qualifying expenses under the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, but it increased the credit for working families to a higher percentage of their qualifying expenses,** and enabled more low-to-middle-income parents with tax liability to claim a greater percentage of the credit.

Check out our *For the Common Good* post and video on “The Big, Bad Bill.”



## Our Defiance

➤ **Both Illinois and Chicago showed our grit in the face of these attacks.** Neighbors defended neighbors. Parents and community members patrolled in front of schools and walked children to classes. Advocates like the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights came together to share know your rights information and supply communities with whistles to signal sightings of ICE. Illinois and Chicago did not cower. **We demonstrated the strength of community, and set an example for other communities across the country.**

➤ Even before the raids, **Illinois passed the Safe Schools for All Act in August, becoming the first state to guarantee education to all children, regardless of their immigration status.** The law also prohibits schools from disclosing the students’ or family members’ immigration status to immigration authorities, limits immigration agents’ access to school property, and requires schools to craft procedures for ICE and other law enforcement actions at schools and school facilities.

➤ **WE supported the SALT Act, which passed in November, protecting day cares, public colleges and universities, hospitals, and courthouses, from federal immigration agents’ access** and allowing individuals to sue federal officers for knowingly violating the Illinois or U.S. constitutions during civil immigration enforcement actions.

➤ **The City of Chicago, along with state officials and immigration rights groups, created resources to help people understand their rights and protect themselves.** Women Employed used our platforms—including our *For the Common Good* webpage, our social channels, and our e-newsletter, to share those resources, as well as resources from local and national partners, with our communities.

## Immigration Reign of Terror

In a year filled with alarming and unprecedented threats and actions, perhaps the most fear-inducing and destructive was the deployment of federal forces against people living and working in American cities—including the Chicago metropolitan area.

### The Damage: Sowing Fear Among Working Families

➤ **As part of Operation Midway Blitz, masked ICE agents in unmarked cars raided neighborhoods and residences—** focusing particularly on immigrants within communities across Chicagoland and beyond. They arrested and detained more than 4,000 people in makeshift prisons in Chicagoland alone—often without providing information to loved ones and lawyers about where they were being held. They kidnapped and deported citizens and legal residents along with undocumented immigrants, often while they were on the job. They threatened schools, stormed daycare facilities, and have now shot and killed multiple innocent people in cities across the country, including in Chicago. Entire communities are now living in fear, too scared to leave their homes for groceries, work, or school.

➤ **WE also joined forces with partner organizations and people all across the metro area for a Hands Off protest in October, which drew over 100,000 people.** This rally, in addition ongoing protests at the ICE detention center in Broadview, showcased our city's, and our state's, defiance in the face of a federal campaign of terror.

➤ **Through our Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub), Women Employed is providing support to women small business owners—including immigrant women.** WE has partnered with community organizations, including Mujeres Latinas en Acción, to host SheSolidarity events in the community, to ensure women can start and grow their businesses as a means to build their economic power.

## Missing and Politicized Data and Reports

The Trump administration has politicized, damaged the integrity of, and even removed, data that we need to understand the needs of everyday Americans and the success of programs and projects. They have also attacked the people who collect and report that data.

### The Damage: Missing Data and Reports

➤ **The Administration announced changes to the EEO-1 data reporting requirements,** which are administered by the EEOC, and have been in place since the 1960s. EEO-1 reporting requires private employers with 100 or more employees to track and submit demographic data by race, ethnicity, and gender, alongside salary information, **which allows the government to identify patterns of discrimination and**

**understand gender and racial wage gaps.** This year, the administration announced they would remove non-binary gender reporting options, requiring employers categorize their employees as either "male" or "female." And while they did require reporting in 2025 for the year 2024, the administration has indicated that they hope to follow Project 2025 by eliminating EEO-1 reporting entirely, making it impossible to track disparities at the federal level, guide enforcement, or inform anti-discrimination policy.

➤ **DOGE attacked the federal employees responsible for data, making deep staffing cuts to data and reporting agencies.** For instance, more than a third of Bureau of Labor Statistics leadership positions are currently vacant, and more staffing and funding cuts have been proposed. The lack of personnel has made it difficult to collect, produce, and share crucial data about the economy and the country as a whole. Even our country's next Census is at risk, which will impact the ability of communities to access federal funding, vital programming, and political representation.

➤ **In August, President Trump fired the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), because he didn't like the numbers in the monthly jobs report.** The retaliation against her sent a signal that, even when the federal employees who collect and report data are nonpartisan and the data is objective, this administration will take aim at them if that data doesn't fit their preferred narrative. **That puts the integrity of all data coming out of this administration at risk.** He then nominated E.J. Antoni to replace her—a candidate who had shown his willingness to bend to the administration's whims, and who threatened to end the jobs reports entirely.

➤ Not only is the administration attacking current and future collection of data, **they are erasing data that has already been published.** From the first days of this administration, there has been a targeted removal of any existing data and reports that reflected poorly on the administration, or that didn't align with the administration's political agenda, including removing (and often subsequent rewriting) any data or reports that include certain key words, including "equity," "diversity," "gender," and many others. Research, reports, and entire data sets have vanished from government websites across a wide variety of agencies. Scrubbing past data in concert with limiting future data collection makes it very difficult to understand trends over time or what has been effective in addressing disparities.

### Our Defiance

➤ When it became clear that the federal administration would hamstring the enforcement power of the EEOC, WE knew we had to decouple Illinois' pay data collection and reporting from federal EEO-1 requirements, as we mentioned on page 11. **Women Employed and other advocates worked with the Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL) to pass a law ensuring Illinois' Equal Pay Registration Certificate doesn't rely on federal filings,** so that we can still receive the data we need from Illinois' larger employers to identify and rectify wage gaps and pay discrimination. What's more, that data shows that the Illinois Equal Pay Act has made an impact in narrowing the wage gap in Illinois.

➤ **WE joined advocates across the country to oppose E.J. Antoni's nomination** to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, mobilizing constituents to contact their senators. Because of the strong outcry of opposition, **the White House was forced to withdraw him from consideration.**

➤ Given threats to data access and integrity, **experts and organizations have mobilized to download and archive as much data as possible** to ensure preservation and ongoing access for researchers and advocates. Women Employed has joined coalitions and strategy sessions to stay on top of federal data issues.

➤ **Women Employed wrote or signed on to public comment letters opposing the removal (or changes in collection) of key federal data sources, opposing politicization of data and statistical agencies, and preserving privacy protections for personal data.**

Check out our *For the Common Good* video and blog post on the Bureau of Labor Statistics



## Monitoring Emerging Threats

Each day, this administration takes new actions that put us all at risk. The emerging threats are too many to name, and it can be hard to tell which are bluster and which are real. However, we strive to monitor them to ensure we can stay on top of the dangers. Here are two examples of emerging threats that we are watching:

➤ **Project 2026:** The Heritage Foundation—a right-wing think tank whose Project 2025 playbook has served as the blueprint for many of the Trump administration policies—[recently released their plans for Project 2026](#). The plan puts women and LGBTQ+ folks in the crosshairs even more explicitly. Reproductive rights, voting rights, civil rights, access to education, gender-affirming healthcare, the social safety net—all of these and more will be in danger if this plan comes to fruition.

➤ **Funding Freezes for Safety Net Programs in Illinois and Four Other States:** In January 2026, [the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced they would freeze \\$10 billion in funding](#) for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program and other social services grants in Illinois, Minnesota, New York, California, and Colorado. In Illinois, that equates to \$1 billion in frozen funds for child care assistance, which keeps many low-income women in the workforce, allowing them to better support their families. If this comes to fruition, [roughly 100,000 Illinois families, including 152,000 children](#), will be impacted. [A federal judge has blocked this action](#), at least temporarily, and we will continue to monitor the situation, and inform our supporters of actions they can take to help safeguard this vital funding.

## More Defiance + FUTURE Defiance: An Inspiring Surge in Activism

➤ The last 12 months have been frustrating, emotionally taxing, and often scary. **But it has been truly inspiring to see people all across Illinois, and the entire country, rise up, speak out, and make themselves heard.** Women Employed has joined hundreds, thousands, MILLIONS of people in the streets, rising up to protest the actions of this administration. May Day, Labor Day, No Kings, Hands Off—these rallies and more have been some of the largest public rallies in American history. Tens of thousands of people have called their members of Congress, at times overwhelming Congressional switchboards and stuffing voicemail boxes. Women Employed has been honored to help people participate in this activism, and inspired by the fire we've seen in YOU as you push back against injustice.

➤ **We need YOU to keep it up!** The first 12 months have been hard, and the next 12 months will most likely be even harder as the administration tries to force through as much as they can before the November midterm elections. **Collective action works—and it is the most powerful way to stop this administration from inflicting more damage.** Together, we have been able to slow down the destruction this administration has wrought—and we can and will do even more together. So even when the road ahead looks hard, and you feel exhausted, don't lose your motivation. Keep calling your legislators. Keep marching. Keep standing up for your neighbors when ICE attacks. Keep talking to your friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors about the harm being done, and why activism matters. **Keep making your voice heard.** [Sign up for Women Employed's emails](#), and we'll send you actions you can take to protect working women. And, when you need a rest, take one. Take care of yourself so you can keep up the fight.

# CONCLUSION

The damage in this report speaks for itself—but it only touches the surface of ALL the ways this administration is putting us all at risk. **At every turn, the Trump administration has attacked women, People of Color, and working families.** They've ignored precedent, rewritten playbooks, and defied the rule of law. The chaos is not random—it is part of a larger plan to entrench power and wealth in the hands of a few and subjugate women, People of Color, immigrants, the transgender community, and others.

This report documents much of the damage done to working women and families, and where possible, outlines the particular impacts on Illinois. It's important to document so we have a clear-eyed record, while recognizing that things are changing rapidly. Outcomes may evolve as lawsuits work their way through the courts. And there is much damage—and defiance—that we did not include, not because it is less important, but because we focused on Women Employed's

core issues. We trust that other experts and advocates will catalog and respond to those attacks, and we commit to continuing to inform our supporters of the issues impacting working women.

This report is not the end of the story. **While the situation may look bleak, this past year has also shown that We the People still hold the power.** We will write the story of who we want to be. And when we come together, we can fight back. We can protect our rights. We can safeguard our progress with state-level changes, and we can stop or mitigate damaging federal attacks.

**Our work is certainly not done. And we will need you alongside us every step of the way.** [Sign up for our emails](#), stay connected on social, and support our work with a [financial contribution](#). Together, we can weather this storm and rebuild for a stronger, brighter, and more just future.

## About Women Employed

Since 1973, Women Employed (WE) has been opening doors, breaking barriers, and expanding opportunities for working women. Our mission is to increase the economic status of women and remove barriers to economic equity, and we do that by shaping policy change, expanding access to educational opportunities, and advocating for fair and inclusive workplaces so that all women, families, and communities can thrive. For more information, visit [womenemployed.org](https://womenemployed.org) or follow Women Employed on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, and BlueSky



## About For the Common Good

*For the Common Good* is a series where Women Employed breaks down the administration's actions, as well as important issues that impact working women and their families—including the roles and the work of key federal agencies, departments, and programs—and what you can do to make an impact. To learn more, visit [womenemployed.org/commongood](https://womenemployed.org/commongood).



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The content in this report is current as of 1/13/2026. Things are changing rapidly, and outcomes may evolve.



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