

Special Needs Alliance:

Public Policy News You Can Use



October 14, 2025

Trump Administration Drastically Reduces Resources for Education Department's Special Education Division

The Trump administration's sweeping layoffs at the U.S. Department of Education have [effectively dismantled](#) the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), eliminating nearly all staff responsible for administering and overseeing roughly \$15 billion in federal special education funding. The move, which affected hundreds of employees and leaves only a few top officials in place, guts the federal oversight mechanism that ensures states comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – a landmark civil rights law guaranteeing educational access for 7.5 million children with disabilities. Without OSERS staff, there will be no federal monitoring, technical assistance, or direct support for families seeking to enforce their rights, raising fears of inconsistent state enforcement and weakened protections nationwide. Critics, including union leaders and former officials, have called the firings potentially illegal and warned of severe, lasting harm to children with disabilities, describing the layoffs as a fundamental threat to the nation's special education infrastructure.

Former Surgeons General Caution Against RFK Jr.'s Health Policy Agenda

Six former U.S. surgeons general [penned an op-ed](#) sounding the alarm on policy changes implemented by Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kennedy, which they claimed are "endangering the health of the nation." The former health officials served under both Republican and Democratic Presidents dating back to the George H.W. Bush Administration. The op-ed condemns the Secretary's rhetoric surrounding vaccines, including his promotion of widely debunked ideas that vaccines cause autism, and the concerns Kennedy has raised about the risks of mRNA technology the COVID-19 vaccinations. Secretary Kennedy and the Trump Administration have been met with significant public backlash following recent public health decisions, such as the announcement of a link between the use of Tylenol during pregnancy and autism – which sparked an uproar among clinicians and patient advocates across the country. The former surgeons general join a growing coalition of stakeholders, [former health officials](#), and [lawmakers](#) who have publicly disavowed the Secretary.

Secretary Kennedy Draws Criticism for Renewed Claims Linking Tylenol, Autism, and Circumcision

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. sparked widespread criticism after suggesting a link between autism, circumcision, and the use of Tylenol – claims that medical experts have dismissed as scientifically unfounded. During a Cabinet meeting, Kennedy cited unspecified studies to argue that early circumcision doubles autism risk due to Tylenol use, though experts quickly noted that no credible research establishes any causal connection between the two. Medical professionals emphasized that the studies Kennedy likely referenced suffer from confounding variables and flawed design, showing correlation rather than causation. Pediatric and public health experts also pointed out that infants typically do not receive Tylenol during circumcision and that any observed associations disappear with age, further undermining the claim. Health authorities and organizations, including the U.K.'s National Autistic Society, condemned Kennedy's remarks as dangerous misinformation that could erode trust in medical science. The controversy follows the Trump administration's earlier unsupported assertion linking acetaminophen use in pregnancy to autism – claims likewise rejected by major medical bodies.

Disability and Aging Advocates Urge CMS to Protect Vulnerable Groups from Harm Under New Medicaid Work Requirements

The Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD), Disability and Aging Collaborative (DAC), and allied organizations submitted a joint letter to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) urging the Administration to protect people with disabilities, older adults, and caregivers from harmful coverage losses under the new Medicaid community engagement requirements established by the 2025 budget reconciliation act (H.R. 1). While Congress intended to exempt these groups, the organizations warn that past implementation of similar policies in Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF failed to capture all eligible individuals, leading to wrongful disenrollments.

They call on CMS to use rulemaking and guidance to maximize protections by broadly defining "disability," "medically frail," and "family caregiver," minimizing paperwork burdens, and leveraging data systems to automatically verify exemptions. The letter emphasizes that Medicaid is essential for health care, long-term services, and employment supports for millions of people with disabilities and their caregivers, who already face systemic barriers to work and coverage. The signatories urge CMS to ensure states implement these requirements in compliance with the ADA, Section 504, and other civil rights laws, and to allow temporary compliance flexibility to prevent disruptions in care.

What's on Tap

The shutdown [entered](#) its fourteenth day today, marking one of the longest shutdowns of the federal government in modern history – outside of the previous shutdown in President Trump's first term that lasted 35 days. Congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle are

locked in a standoff on how to proceed with government funding. Democrats have remained steadfast in their position, seeking an extension of the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) advance premium tax credits (APTCs). On the other side of the aisle, Republicans have maintained their support for the 'clean' funding package that was passed out of the GOP-controlled House back in September. Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) has signaled an openness to potentially negotiating and extension of APTCs after the government has reopened, but that option has so far failed to draw out necessary Democratic support.

While Republican leadership on Capitol Hill has publicly stated that any negotiations surrounding APTCs needs to occur after the government reopens, recent [reporting indicates](#) that some House GOP leadership and members of the Trump Administration are working behind closed doors to discuss possible pathways to prevent the subsidies from expiring at the end of this year. The potential extension would come with several caveats attached, including a \$200,000 income limit, a minimum out-of-pocket premium, barring new enrollees from the tax credits, and imposing abortion restrictions. Democrats have signaled an openness to these proposals outside of the abortion restrictions, although it is unclear to what extent congressional republicans are onboard. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) said late last week that "90 percent of members of our conference, they feel strongly that Obamacare itself and the subsidies have failed." Despite backlash on the validity of the claim, Republicans have coalesced around the message that APTCs provide free healthcare for illegal immigrants and that the entire ACA marketplace is filled with fraud, waste and abuse.

Late Friday afternoon, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) director Russell Vought [announced](#) the beginning of more mass layoffs of federal workers – something President Trump has threatened since the beginning of the shutdown. Although the final tally remains unknown, the White House said over the weekend that approximately 4,200 federal employees will face termination. Notably, The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is reportedly dismissing between 1,100 and 1,200 employees in this round of layoffs – by far the most facing any agency during the shutdown. HHS spokesperson, Andrew Nixon, said all HHS employees receiving reduction-in-force (RIF) notices were designated non-essential by their respective divisions. The new RIFs follow the dismissal of over 20,000 workers at HHS via RIFs and voluntary resignations. Over the weekend, the White House [quietly rescinded](#) around 700 termination notices to previously dismissed employees at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – the agency hit hardest by the most recent round of layoffs.

Upcoming Events

Senate

- In Session: October 14th – 18th

House

- Out of Session

Congressional bandwidth is expected to be largely taken up by government funding negotiations this week