

D.C.

Judge temporarily pauses Trump administration's federal worker buyout program

Federal workers now have until Monday, Feb. 10, at 11:59 p.m. to decide whether to resign with pay through the end of September, the Trump administration said.

Updated yesterday at 7:41 p.m. EST

🕒 7 min ➦ 📌 💬 4467

By [Olivia George](#), [Steve Thompson](#), [Emily Davies](#), [Rachel Siegel](#) and [Lisa Rein](#)

A judge in Massachusetts temporarily paused the Trump administration's [buyout program](#) for federal workers Thursday afternoon, two days after unions representing more than 800,000 federal workers filed a lawsuit to delay the program's deadline.

U.S. District Judge George A. O'Toole Jr. said the administration could not take further action on the program until a hearing Monday afternoon, when both sides can present more arguments on the case. To comply with the order, the Office of Personnel Management extended the deadline for federal employees to Monday, Feb. 10, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern time, according to a [post](#) from the agency on X.

The change further plunged workers into limbo, as the administration pushes to drastically reduce and reshape the federal workforce. Federal employees originally had until 11:59 p.m. Thursday to decide whether they would take up the offer to resign and be paid through the end of September.

Now, employees have an extended deadline for the program but little clarity on what lies beyond it. As of Thursday, 50,000 people had accepted the offer, according to a person familiar with internal conversations, who was not authorized to speak publicly. It remains unclear how the pause may affect those employees.

Despite the order, the Trump administration believes agencies can continue to process resignations, said another person, and officials continued to cajole employees into the deal.

"We encourage federal workers in this city to accept the very generous offer. If they don't want to show up to the office, if they want to rip the American people off, then they're welcome to take this buyout, and we'll find highly competent individuals who want to fill these roles," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Thursday.

“The program is NOT being blocked or canceled. The government will honor the deferred resignation offer,” the Office of Personnel Management wrote on X early Thursday evening.

Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-New York) praised the court’s decision in a statement Thursday.

“It’s going to take a multipronged approach to fight Trump’s lawless agenda,” Schumer said. “The law and the Constitution are on our side, and we have to continue to press the fight in court, in Congress, and in the public square.”

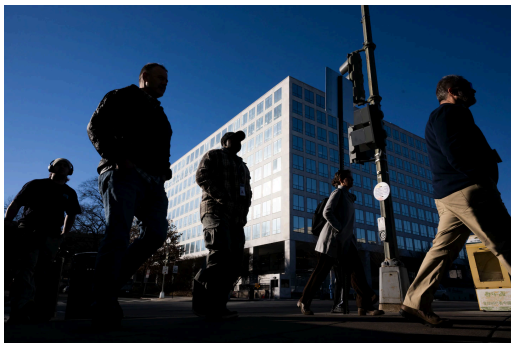
Three government unions — the American Federation of Government Employees, the National Association of Government Employees, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees — and the nonprofit group Democracy Forward filed the suit, claiming that the program is an “arbitrary, unlawful, short-fused ultimatum.”

“We are pleased the court temporarily paused this deadline while arguments are heard about the legality of the deferred resignation program,” AFGE National President Everett Kelley said in a statement. “We continue to believe this program violates the law, and we will continue to aggressively defend our members’ rights.”

Lawyers for the government said in a legal brief Thursday that the judge’s delay “would have remarkably disruptive and inequitable repercussions” on President Donald Trump’s attempt to transform the federal workforce.

Employees first heard about the buyout program on Jan. 28 in an email from OPM. With the subject line “Fork in the Road,” the message outlined the administration’s intent to “reform” the federal workforce and started the decision-making clock for the “deferred resignation program.”

Federal workers and Trump’s resignation offer



A federal judge has temporarily paused the deadline for the Trump administration’s buyout program. According to a memo, federal layoffs are “likely” if too few employees choose to quit. Here’s what we know about the “deferred resignation” offer.

According to the White House, most of the 2.3 million federal workers are eligible for the buyout. Agency heads may make exceptions, and military personnel, U.S. Postal Service employees and people working in immigration enforcement and national security are exempt, according to the OPM. To pursue the deferred resignation offer, according to OPM instructions, eligible federal employees need to reply from their government account with the word “resign.”

As federal workers weighed their options, agencies sent messages outlining more details about the program and touting its benefits. On his social media platform X, Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service has characterized the program as an opportunity to loaf: "take the vacation you always wanted, or just watch movies and chill, while receiving your full government pay and benefits."

But workers have also faced increasing pressure to take the offer: Layoffs are "likely" if too few employees choose to quit, a supervisor at the General Services Administration told staff members early this week, according to an email obtained by The Washington Post.

On Thursday, OPM issued a directive to federal agencies to identify poor-performing employees to give the administration the "ability to swiftly terminate [those] who cannot or will not improve."

All employees who received less than a "fully successful" performance rating in the past three years must be identified, a memorandum from the personnel agency said. The number will come to just 1 percent of civil servants, government personnel experts said, in part because performance rating systems have historically been extremely generous.

Experts have said for years that appraisals in government are highly subjective and managers are often pressured to avoid difficult conversations. Federal workers themselves have long complained in annual surveys that their agencies do not deal with poor performers, hurting morale and efficiency.

The administration is also expanding pathways for early retirement. Employees at the Department of Health and Human Services were notified this week that OPM had approved the agency's authority to temporarily lower the age and service requirements for those opting into the deferred resignation program. Interior Department employees received similar news, according to emails reviewed by The Post.

Several federal workers and former staffers have shared concerns about the massive loss of institutional knowledge as top officials take the offer.

At the Department of Housing and Urban Development, departures include some of the highest-ranking career staffers with decades of combined experience and expertise, according to multiple people familiar with the changes.

Among them is Dominique Blom, who oversaw housing choice vouchers, public housing and Native American programs, serving more than 3.5 million households. She is widely seen in the department as essential. Danielle Bastarache, who had a primary role overseeing HUD's largest rental-assistance program, and Ashley Sheriff, responsible for inspection processes for public housing, have also left. Blom, Bastarache and Sheriff did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Late Thursday, a HUD spokesperson said the agency does not comment on personnel matters.

People close to the department said the departures were tied to the buyout deadline and early retirement incentives, combined with broad expectations for massive cuts across HUD. The nature of their departures appears distinct from those of other career officials in the federal government, who have faced pressure from DOGE emissaries for access to sensitive payment systems or personal staff information.

An employee at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office said they learned Thursday that two senior managers in the HR department are planning to take the deferred resignation offer. Collectively, the two departing officials have more than 25 years of experience in the agency. They help lead a division in charge of administrative training for 14,000 people.

The employee described one of the departing officials as the best supervisor in their decades-long career. The official gave “insightful and frequent feedback,” was eager to hear new ideas for the team, sent thank-you notes to her staff’s home addresses and bought small gifts for the holidays, the employee said.

“I don’t imagine I will ever have a partner who I’ll want to work as hard for as her,” the employee wrote in a text message. “It’s a huge loss for me and the agency that she’s leaving.”

For a Justice Department employee struggling to make up her mind ahead of the Thursday night deadline, the judge’s action was a wish fulfilled. The employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of professional retribution, said she’s still “flip-flopping.”

She doesn’t think the offer is legal, she said, but she worries that if she lingers in the federal workforce, she could be fired and left with no pay. Now, she says, she’ll have at least a few more days to decide the fate of her career.

Maxine Joselow, Aaron Wiener, Hannah Natanson and Rachel Rouben contributed to this report.