



LEGAL UPDATES

President Trump Issues Executive Order Directed at Reforming Accreditation in Higher Education

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Overview:

On April 23, 2025, President Trump signed several education-related Executive Orders, including one titled, “Reforming Accreditation to Strengthen Higher Education” (the “Accreditation Order”). The Accreditation Order focuses on two directives: (1) ensuring that accreditors do not require higher education institutions seeking accreditation to engage in “unlawful discrimination” through diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”) initiatives, and (2) reforming the accreditation system to align with “high-quality, valuable education for students.”

The Accreditation Order directs the Secretary of Education to deny, monitor, suspend, or terminate accreditation recognition of accreditors who “engage in unlawful discrimination in accreditation-related activity under the guise of” DEI initiatives. The Accreditation Order specifically names the American Bar Association’s Council of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, and the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education—the sole accreditors for Juris Doctor programs, Doctor of Medicine degree programs, and allopathic and osteopathic medical residency and fellowship programs, respectively—as accreditors who have “DEI-based standards of accreditation.” The Accreditation Order directs the U.S. Attorney General and Secretary of Education to investigate and terminate unlawful discrimination by American law schools, medical schools, and graduate medical education entities, “including unlawful ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ requirements under the guise of accreditation standards.”

The Accreditation Order also instructs the Secretary of Education to take steps to promote “student-oriented accreditation,” including:

- Recognizing new accreditors to increase competition and accountability;
- Directing accreditors to require member institutions to use student program-level data to improve outcomes, without reference to race, ethnicity, or sex;

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- Providing accreditors with noncompliance findings relating to member institutions that are issued following Title VI and Title IX investigations conducted by the Office of Civil Rights; and
- Streamlining the process for higher education institutions to change accreditors.

Implications:

The Accreditation Order could have several implications for accreditors and higher education institutions. Accreditors with policies or standards that appear to promote DEI may face denial, monitoring, suspension, or termination by the Trump Administration. If an accreditor is subject to termination, member institutions may no longer meet eligibility requirements under Title IV, which allows a college or university to participate in the federal financial aid program. Furthermore, new accreditors may emerge, which could increase competition among accreditors and provide more options for higher education institutions. That said, changes to accreditation likely will take time, given the lengthy processes involved for both approving new accreditors and reviewing higher education institutions for accreditation.

Next Steps:

Due to current legal challenges surrounding DEI programming and education-related executive orders, much remains to be seen about the scope of this Accreditation Order. In the meantime, accreditors and higher education institutions should actively monitor and continue to be aware of potential changes in accreditation and federal funding, and work with legal counsel to best position themselves for any consequences.

If you have questions about the potential impacts of this Accreditation Order on your school or institution, please contact [Kathryn Nash](#), [Graciela Quintana](#), or your regular Lathrop GPM attorney.

Natalie Kay is a law clerk in the Labor, Employment, and Higher Education group who contributed to the writing of this legal alert.