



March 26, 2026

Office for Civil Rights U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW

Washington, D.C. 20202-1100

Re: Discrimination Complaint Against Stanford University

Dear Office for Civil Rights:

This submission constitutes a formal civil rights complaint against the Leland Stanford Junior University (“Stanford”), filed pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The America First Policy Institute (“AFPI”) respectfully requests that your office open an investigation into potential violations of federal law and guidance regarding non-discrimination policies and practices at Stanford, a recipient of substantial federal funding. Based upon our investigation, Stanford appears to have employed policies and practices that may violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d *et seq.*, and related federal nondiscrimination requirements.

AFPI is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to advancing policies and litigation that put the American people first. AFPI’s guiding principles are liberty, free enterprise, national greatness, American military superiority, foreign policy in the American interest and the primacy of American workers, families and communities.

As a federal contractor and recipient of federal funds, Stanford is subject to the requirements of Title VI, Title VII, Title IX, the Equal Protection Clause, and the July 29, 2025 Attorney General Memorandum: Guidance for Recipients of Federal Funding Regarding Unlawful Discrimination (“Guidance”). These authorities strictly prohibit the use of race, color, national origin, sex, or

their proxies in any aspect of program design or selection criteria.

On Dec. 9th, 2025, AFPI sent a letter to Stanford raising several areas of concern and requesting clarification of Stanford's efforts to bring their programs in line with federal nondiscrimination law. **Exhibit A.**

We received a response dated Jan. 29th, 2026, wherein Stanford claimed that all identified programs and communications were executed in line with then-existing federal guidance, and that Stanford is now committed to full compliance with the current administration's policies and orders. **Exhibit B.** While Stanford may have removed or modified certain previously identified materials, the University continues to maintain numerous policies and programs that raise the same concerns under federal anti-discrimination law. Stanford has provided no explanation regarding what actions have been taken to ensure full compliance, and the materials described below remain publicly available on Stanford's website.

Stanford's potentially unlawful acts and practices include the following:

I. Stanford maintains ideological and diversity statement requirements in trustee committee applications.

Stanford's Associated Students of Stanford University (ASSU) Nominations Commission reportedly requires applicants seeking to serve on Board of Trustees committees to demonstrate a commitment to "diversity, equity, and inclusion." (<https://stanfordreview.org/open-letter-to-the-board-of-trustees/?ref=the-stanford-review-newsletter>) Requiring applicants for governance-related positions to affirm ideological commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion raises concerns where such commitments may function as a proxy for race-based viewpoints or identity characteristics. When ideological requirements are intertwined with race-conscious objectives, they may improperly condition participation in university governance opportunities on protected characteristics or university-approved viewpoints.

The Attorney General's Guidance for Recipients of Federal Funding Regarding Unlawful Discrimination cautions institutions against using race, ethnicity, or proxies for protected characteristics in program eligibility or selection criteria. (AG Guidance § IV(A)(2)). If Stanford conditions participation in governance-related opportunities on ideological commitments closely tied to race-conscious objectives, such requirements may raise serious concerns under federal nondiscrimination law.

II. Stanford operates an Office of the Vice Provost for Institutional Equity, Access & Community that promotes race-conscious institutional objectives.

Stanford maintains an Office of the Vice Provost for Institutional Equity, Access & Community whose stated mission includes creating an environment that "embraces diversity, advances equity and cultivates inclusion." (<https://equity.stanford.edu/>) While universities may promote equal opportunity, programs structured around "equity" initiatives or race-conscious objectives may

raise concerns where they influence the allocation of opportunities, resources, or institutional decision-making processes. The Attorney General’s Guidance specifically warns that federal funding recipients may not use race or race-based proxies when allocating institutional opportunities or benefits. (AG Guidance § IV(C)(3)).

If Stanford’s institutional equity initiatives influence hiring, promotion, admissions, or program participation decisions using race-conscious criteria or race-based proxies, such practices may conflict with federal nondiscrimination requirements.

III. Stanford operates identity-based cultural centers that appear to prioritize access based on race or identity characteristics.

Stanford operates eight cultural centers under the umbrella of the “Centers for Equity, Community, and Leadership.” (<https://bcsc.stanford.edu/>) These centers include identity-specific facilities such as the “Black Community Services Center” and the “Black House.” The Black Community Services Center reportedly prioritizes reservations for groups affiliated with the Center and those whose programming aligns with its mission.

Programs that reserve institutional resources or facilities for groups defined by race, ethnicity, or similar protected characteristics may raise concerns under federal nondiscrimination law. The Attorney General’s Guidance states that federally funded institutions may not allocate benefits, opportunities, or resources on the basis of protected characteristics. (AG Guidance § IV(C)(3)).

If Stanford provides preferential access to facilities or programming opportunities based on race or identity-based criteria, such practices may conflict with federal nondiscrimination obligations applicable to recipients of federal financial assistance.

IV. Stanford’s School of Medicine maintains diversity pipeline programs designed to increase participation based on race or demographic characteristics.

Stanford’s School of Medicine and Genetics Department describe diversity and outreach initiatives designed to expand recruiting efforts and create a “pipeline of diversity” into genomics and biosciences. (<https://oge.stanford.edu/inclusion/inclusion-resources-and-partnerships/>) Additionally, Stanford Medicine publicly states that “diversity is a core value” and emphasizes the importance of ensuring diverse representation in programs and leadership. (<https://med.stanford.edu/diversity.html>)

The Obstetrics and Gynecology Department also maintains a “Diversity Committee,” and department leadership has emphasized the importance of increasing diversity among faculty, trainees, and staff. (<https://obgyn.stanford.edu/diversity.html>)

While outreach initiatives are not inherently unlawful, programs that prioritize recruitment, selection, or advancement based on race or demographic characteristics may violate federal nondiscrimination law. The Attorney General’s Guidance expressly warns against using race,

ethnicity, or similar protected characteristics in program design or selection criteria. (AG Guidance § IV(A)(2)).

If Stanford's pipeline or recruitment initiatives evaluate candidates or allocate opportunities using race-based criteria or proxies, such practices may conflict with Title VI and other applicable federal nondiscrimination requirements.

V. Stanford offers executive education programming centered on diversity and inclusion initiatives that encourage race-conscious workforce design.

Stanford Graduate School of Business offers an executive education program titled "Leverage Diversity and Inclusion for Organizational Excellence." (<https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/exec-ed/programs/leverage-diversity-inclusion-organizational-excellence>) The program advertises instruction on how organizations can "increase their talent pool" and "encourage diverse perspectives" in order to design a diverse workforce.

While private instruction on management practices is not inherently unlawful, programs that promote the use of race-conscious hiring or employment practices may encourage conduct that conflicts with federal nondiscrimination law. The Attorney General's Guidance emphasizes that recipients of federal funding may not use race or race-based proxies when making employment decisions. (AG Guidance § IV(A)(2)).

To the extent Stanford encourages or promotes employment practices that prioritize race or demographic characteristics in workforce design, such instruction may raise concerns regarding compliance with federal nondiscrimination obligations.

Given the substantial amount of federal funding that Stanford receives, and Stanford's obligation to conform to federal nondiscrimination law and guidance, AFPI respectfully recommends that the Office of Civil Rights investigate these concerns. We hope to be kept informed as to the status of the investigation.

Sincerely,

Leigh Ann O'Neill

Leigh Ann O'Neill
Chief Legal Affairs Officer

Skylar McCann

Skylar McCann
Legal Department Clerk

America First Policy Institute



December 9, 2025

Skyлар McCann
America First Policy Institute
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smccann@americafirstpolicy.com

VIA CERTIFIED MAIL, RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Mr. Jonathan Levin, President
The Leland Stanford Junior University
450 Jane Stanford Way
Stanford, CA 94305

Re: Investigation of Potential Unlawful Discrimination in The Leland Stanford Junior University Programs

Dear Mr. Levin:

The America First Policy Institute (AFPI) is investigating whether The Leland Stanford Junior University (“Stanford”) may be violating federal nondiscrimination laws in a number of its research, training, educational, and DEI-linked programs. Our concerns arise from publicly available program descriptions and DEI resources suggesting that Stanford gives preferential treatment or targeted access to certain opportunities on the basis of a person’s race, color, national origin, sex, or related characteristics in direct violation of federal nondiscrimination laws.

AFPI is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to advancing policies and litigation that put the American people first. AFPI’s guiding principles are liberty, free enterprise, national greatness, American military superiority, foreign policy in the American interest and the primacy of American workers, families, and communities.

As a federal contractor and recipient of federal funds, Stanford is subject to the requirements of Title VI, as well as Title VII, Title IX, the Equal Protection Clause, and the July 29, 2025, “Guidance for Recipients of Federal Funding Regarding Unlawful Discrimination” issued by Attorney General Pam Bondi. These authorities strictly prohibit the use of race, color, national origin, sex, or their proxies in any aspect of program design, hiring, or selection. (AG Guidance § IV(A)-(D)).

Based on AFPI’s initial examination of Stanford’s publicly available information, the practices detailed below raise serious concerns of a potential violation:

I. The DRIVE Pathway Program materials contain statements implying that participation is limited based on diversity characteristics in a manner inconsistent with federal nondiscrimination requirements.

- “The Diversity, Respect, and Inclusion are Vital for Excellence (DRIVE) in Research Pathway aims to improve the diversity of the research workforce underrepresented in maternal and child health-related research while supporting mentorship and training.”
- “This program is intended to maintain and grow the pathway of diverse students interested in pursuing biomedical research careers.”

Statements of this nature, in the context of applicant recruitment, suggest that Stanford may be evaluating or prioritizing candidates for this program based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, or related demographic characteristics. The Attorney General’s Guidance expressly warns against using “diversity” or similar criteria as proxies for protected characteristics when selecting participants for internships or programs. (AG Guidance § IV(A)(1)-(2); § IV(B)(1)-(2)).

II. The CVI Summer Research Program includes language implying that participation may be targeted toward a “diverse pool,” suggesting the use of demographic preferences.

- Stanford’s CVI Summer Research Program materials state that the program “is designed to train a diverse cohort of medical students.”
- Stanford explicitly states that the “goal of this R25 program is to increase the number of minorities pursuing careers in cardiovascular medical research by providing undergraduate underrepresented minority (URM) students with a short-term mentored research experience in the laboratories of Stanford Medicine’s Cardiovascular Institute.”

This language suggests that demographic characteristics directly influence recruitment or selection decisions. Federal law, along with the Attorney General’s Guidance, makes clear that federally funded programs may not employ diversity-based preferences in making such determinations. (AG Guidance § IV(A)(1)-(2); § IV(C)(3)-(4)).

III. The School of Engineering’s DEI webpage contains diversity-based objectives and resources.

- Stanford’s School of Engineering maintains DEI webpages, including the Chemical Engineering DEI page, which sets forth diversity and representation goals and provides DEI resources that are accessible only to individuals with student login credentials.
- Additionally, Stanford’s School of Engineering publicly affirms its “commitment to diversity.”

The School of Engineering’s DEI webpages reflect institutional objectives that appear to prioritize diversity and representation based on protected characteristics, which violate federal anti-discrimination laws. Further, restricting DEI-related resources to individuals with Stanford login credentials raises concerns that the University may be hiding information. This publicly available information implies that Stanford University has been administering diversity-based opportunities or benefits in direct violation of federal law and the Attorney General’s memorandum. (AG Guidance § IV(A)(1); § IV(C)(1)-(2)).

* * *

The above practices, as described, suggest that Stanford may be engaged in direct preferential treatment on the basis of sex, race, and national origin. (AG Guidance § IV(A)-(D)). We therefore encourage Stanford to provide additional information about these programs so that we may assess whether they are in compliance with federal non-discrimination laws.

To evaluate compliance, we request:

- (1) the eligibility criteria, selection procedures, and evaluative materials used for the DRIVE Pathway Program, the CVI Summer Research Program, and any other research or training programs that reference “diversity,” “underrepresented minorities,” or similar concepts in describing their purpose or applicant pool;
- (2) all internal guidance, directives, or training provided to faculty or staff regarding how demographic characteristics or diversity-related objectives should be considered in recruiting or selecting participants;
- (3) all partnership agreements, funding arrangements, and pipeline-program materials involving external organizations that support or administer diversity-focused programs;
- (4) any demographic data for recent applicant and participant cohorts, as well as the DEI materials, resources, or webpages referenced above, including those restricted behind Stanford login credentials; and
- (5) any internal legal or compliance assessments conducted in response to federal

nondiscrimination obligations or the July 29, 2025, Attorney General's Guidance.

Thank you for your prompt attention to these serious compliance issues. Given Stanford's obligations as a federal contractor and recipient of federal funds, it is imperative that all internship, apprenticeship, and workforce-development programs operate in full alignment with federal nondiscrimination requirements.

We look forward to receiving the information about Stanford's programs as requested above. We also welcome your response detailing the steps Stanford has taken to ensure that no program, partnership, or selection process confers unlawful preferential treatment based on protected characteristics or their proxies.

Please direct your responses to me at the address listed above. We look forward to your affirmative reply to this letter by December 31, 2025.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Skylar McCann". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Skylar McCann
America First Policy Institute

January 29, 2026

Ms. Skylar McCann
America First Policy Institute
1455 Pennsylvania Ave N.W., Suite 225
Washington, D.C. 20004
smccann@americafirstpolicy.com

Dear Ms. McCann:

Thank you for your request regarding several Stanford programs. Stanford complies with all applicable federal nondiscrimination laws. The university is committed to maintaining an educational, working, and living environment free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. We have robust education and training for our community to this end, as well as policies, procedures, and processes that comply with both federal and state civil rights laws. These include, but are not limited to, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

After the Supreme Court's decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* ("SFFA"), Stanford engaged in a comprehensive review of its admissions and program selection policies, practices, and procedures, and made changes to ensure compliance. As part of this process, the university undertook a significant effort to revise webpages and program descriptions to reflect these updates.

You inquired about the DRIVE Pathway Program, the CVI Summer Research Program and a Chemical Engineering webpage.

We confirm that the DRIVE Pathway and CVI Summer Research programs comply with applicable civil rights laws. Neither program evaluates or prioritizes candidates based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, or related demographic characteristics and, consistent with our practices post-SFFA, those reviewing applications do not see diversity-related data. The websites have been updated to reflect this as clearly as possible.

The DRIVE Pathway Program started as and continues to be a program for Stanford undergraduate students who are the first in their family to pursue higher education and/or who come from a low-income background and would benefit from financial assistance. Eligibility is open to those students who are currently enrolled in their sophomore year, have had minimal or no prior research experience, and are interested in biomedical research and working with Stanford faculty during the summer of 2026 on maternal and child health related research. The language referenced in your request has been removed from the program's website.

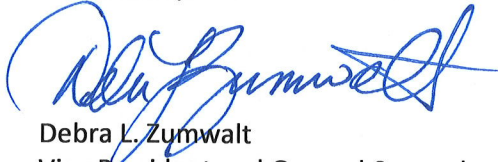
Skylar McCann, AFPI
January 29, 2026
Page 2

The CVI Summer Research Program was funded through an NIH grant focused on underrepresented minority students. Since 2023 the program has been open to all undergraduates subject to NIH citizenship requirements. Student applications are evaluated based on the following criteria alone: potential, self-awareness, competence, commitment and intentionality. The language you mentioned in your letter came from an older flyer that was linked to the CVI website and has now been removed.

The Chemical Engineering website you referenced was outdated and has been deleted. Many of the resources referenced were linked to Stanford's IDEAL initiative which began in 2018 and was sunset in 2025.

We appreciate you bringing these cases to our attention. We assure you that Stanford is dedicated to ensuring an environment of equal and open opportunity for all.

Respectfully,



Debra L. Zumwalt
Vice President and General Counsel
Stanford University