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Top Official Replaced at DOJ Immigrant Employee Rights Division

- Office investigates immigration-related employment bias
- IER drew ire of GOP Senators over enforcement focus last year

The US Justice Department has picked a new top lawyer at the office responsible for investigating immigration-related employment bias, according to people familiar with the move.

Alberto Ruisanchez, the longtime chief of DOJ's Immigrant and Employee Rights section, has been replaced by Jennifer Deines, previously special policy counsel at IER, who will fill the top spot on an acting basis.

Ruisanchez's departure was connected to a re-assignment to the Trump administration's new sanctuary city task force, although it wasn't clear if he would remain at the agency.

The office is charged with enforcing antidiscrimination provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act. That statute bars consideration of citizenship status or national origin in hiring, firing, or recruitment. IER also investigates allegations of intimidation or unfair practices in verifying workers' employment authorization.

The agency didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Although IER attorneys have traditionally focused on bias against immigrants, the office applied more scrutiny to alleged discrimination against US citizens during the first Trump administration. Those efforts included a “Protecting U.S. Workers” initiative started in 2017 to look into employers showing a preference for foreign employees, like those on temporary visas.

Push for Shifting Focus

Senate Republicans, among them Vice President J.D. Vance, last year accused IER of falling short in investigating bias against US citizens.

In a letter to Ruisanchez and then-assistant attorney general for civil rights Kristen Clarke, they said the office had devoted a disproportionate share of its enforcement efforts to protecting immigrant workers, rather than bias against US workers.

IER was also part of legal tussle with Elon Musk’s SpaceX, alleging in a 2023 administrative lawsuit that the rocket manufacturer routinely discriminated against immigrant workers in hiring decisions.

A federal district court later blocked proceedings, granting an injunction sought by SpaceX after finding that the DOJ internal judge system handling the case was likely unconstitutional. DOJ attorneys in January said they were exploring actions to resolve the case and requested a stay on the litigation.

Immigration Agenda

The Trump administration has sought to re-assign multiple key Justice Department officials to the new Sanctuary Cities Enforcement Working Group. The unit was created to identify state and local laws that impede the administration’s federal immigration agenda.

David McConnell, director of the appeals section of the Office of Immigration Litigation, and Bruce Swartz, an attorney who represented DOJ in sensitive foreign dealings, both resigned rather than take assignments to the Sanctuary Cities initiative.

Kathleen Wolfe, the career official designated acting chief of the Justice Department civil rights division after Trump’s inauguration, was transferred to the Sanctuary Cities unit earlier this month. The Trump administration also re-assigned the appellate chief of the civil rights division and her deputy to the initiative.

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