

# Trump Administration Fires Immigration Court Officials as Crackdown Begins

Four immigration court officials were removed from their positions on Monday. It's unclear who is in charge at this point.



**By Hamed Aleaziz**

Reporting from Washington

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The acting head of the U.S. immigration court system and three other top officials were fired on Monday soon after President Trump took office, according to three people familiar with the matter, in a purge of the top echelon of a critical part of the government's immigration system.

The abrupt removals signaled that the Trump administration wants to remake the immigration court system, which is housed under the Justice Department, as part of a broader immigration crackdown that Mr. Trump began within minutes of being sworn in for his second term.

Immigration judges oversee an essential part of the system: granting asylum to migrants whose claims pass muster and ordering the deportation of those whose cases do not.

Tom Jawetz, a senior lawyer in the Homeland Security Department in the Biden administration, said the move suggested that Mr. Trump would try to insert loyalists who could undermine veteran career officials into key roles, as he did during his first term.

“Politicals during the first Trump administration ran roughshod over the career civil servants who have dedicated their lives to public service,” Mr. Jawetz said in an interview. “A Day 1 blood bath like this indicates that they don’t intend to change course now.”

The four officials included Mary Cheng, the acting director of the Executive Office of Immigration Review. The three others fired were Sheila McNulty, the chief immigration judge; Lauren Alder Reid, the head of policy for the agency; and Jill Anderson, the general counsel in the Executive Office of Immigration Review.

On Monday evening, Sirce E. Owen, an immigration court official, took over as acting director of the Executive Office of Immigration Review.

“I received an email from the justice management division after 3 p.m. that informed me that I had been removed,” Ms. Alder Reid said in an interview on Monday.

Ms. Alder Reid had been with the agency for more than 14 years. Ms. Cheng had been with the department since 2009.

In Mr. Trump’s first term, his administration sought to reshape the immigration court system by instituting quotas for judges and no longer allowing them to pause cases that they felt were not a priority. It also altered when immigration judges could grant asylum to migrants appearing in court.

“The firing of these senior immigration court officials will be a severe setback to the effective functioning of the courts which are already backlogged with millions of cases and need experienced court administrators to ensure cases move expeditiously through the judicial process,” said Greg Chen, senior director of government relations for the American Immigration Lawyers Association, which represents the nation’s immigration lawyers.

The court system has been under immense pressure for years. The immigration court backlog ballooned to more than three million cases at the end of 2024 fiscal year, according to the Congressional Research Service.

***A correction was made on Jan. 20, 2025: An earlier version of this article, relying on incorrect information from Mary Cheng, misstated how long Ms. Cheng had been with the Executive Office of Immigration Review before her firing. She had been with the department since 2009, not 2001.***

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