

## Two Stories about USAID Demise. Devex, 24 Feb 2025

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### Unpause

That didn't take long. After a court order Friday paved the way for thousands of USAID staffers to be placed on administrative leave (more on that below), employees received a notice Sunday alerting them that not only will most USAID direct hires worldwide be placed on leave, [but that 1,600 personnel in the U.S. will be fired](#) — or, in government speak, **subject to a “reduction-in-force.”**

“As of 11:59 p.m. EST on Sunday, February 23, **all USAID direct hire personnel**, with the exception of designation personnel responsible for mission-critical functions, core leadership and/or specially designated programs, **will be placed on administrative leave globally,**” the notice stated.

It isn't clear which staff at USAID will be affected by the 1,600 firings, my colleague Elissa Miolene reports.

“**Is this civil service? Foreign service? All?**” asks one USAID staffer. “No clarity.”

“There's more order and yet they still are producing chaos,” the staffer says. “We keep getting these big, scary emails on weekends. There's **no day free of the scare tactics and mental torture.**”

Over the weekend, staff members [started to receive letters indicating their employment was terminated](#). My colleague Sara Jerving obtained copies of termination notices — including to someone stationed abroad — in which Peter Marocco, USAID's acting deputy administrator, said they were “**being released**” from their “**competitive level**” because that “competitive area is being eliminated.”

USAID employees also received more details over the weekend about the [State Department](#) team tasked with recalling staff members abroad. One USAID employee abroad tells Sara that while this new coordination team may be able to handle simple logistics, **it doesn't have a clear mandate for families with complicated situations.**

Sara was informed of one case where USAID's finance team called a staff member's child's school abroad to inquire about refunding the tuition already paid — for a child with special needs.

“It's inhumane and humiliating,” the USAID employee abroad tells Sara.

**Read:** [USAID to cut 1,600 staff, place nearly all direct hires on leave](#)

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**Read more:** [USAID staff start receiving termination letters](#)

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### **Court gesture**

Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump appointee, [initially put a temporary block](#) on the administration's plan to put thousands of USAID employees on administrative leave and recall most staff stationed overseas. However, on Friday, [he found](#) that “the risk posed to USAID employees who are placed on administrative leave while stationed abroad — if there is any — is far more minimal than it initially appeared.”

[Nichols seemed satisfied with reassurances made by Morocco](#) that the agency “will maintain adequate communications and systems to ensure [employees'] safe return,” with the judge stating that the prospect of staff suffering physical harm while on administrative leave abroad was “highly unlikely.”

Crucially, he stated that staff members’ **“archetypal complaints” were largely financial and could be redressed** under existing mechanisms to resolve employee disputes with the federal government.

As to the larger question of the administration's 90-day pause on foreign aid spending, **the judge dismissed the plaintiffs' concern** that it would result in “harsh consequences,” both at home and abroad. He cited the administration's argument that harm could ensue if its actions are not permitted because it argues the foreign aid industry is “not aligned with American interests and in many causes antithetical to American values.”

“Weighing plaintiffs' assertions on these questions against the government's is like comparing apples to oranges,” the judge wrote. “Where one side claims that USAID's operations are essential to human flourishing and the other side claims they are presently at odds with it, it simply is not possible for the Court to conclude.”

So where does that leave USAID employees? Pretty much back where they started: **Staff will be required to decide within 30 days** whether they want to return to the U.S. or remain at their overseas posts. If employees choose to stay, they will be entitled to “all of the benefits previously available” as long as the employee remains on administrative leave, the ruling states.

**After 30 days, staff will lose their travel compensation** unless they receive an “individualized exception” for pregnancy, medical needs, children's school schedules, or “other reasons.”

**Read:** [Court says thousands of USAID staff can be put on leave, recalled](#)