



You Are Not Alone

The State Department's Reductions in Force

What the cuts mean for the American public and what affected employees can do now

Civil Service Strong at Democracy Forward, the Partnership For Public Service, and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) provide this resource for those who want to understand what the State Department and related foreign affairs cuts mean, and federal employees who were separated, reassigned, or otherwise affected by a reduction in force (RIF) or reorganization. The first section explains the public impact. The later sections focus on employee rights, deadlines, evidence preservation, and support resources. Deadlines can be short, forum choices can affect your rights, and the best path depends on your facts, bargaining unit status, appointment type, and notice documents. Consider contacting your union or a qualified employment lawyer as soon as possible.

At a Glance

- In July 2025, the State Department issued RIF notices to more than 1,350 employees as part of a sweeping reorganization. ([AP News](#), [The Guardian](#), [Reuters](#), [Government Executive](#)). This included approximately 1,107 civil servants and 246 Foreign Service Officers.
- The RIF and reorganization plans affected both employees and the public services those employees provide, including support for U.S. citizens abroad, crisis response, diplomacy, lawful migration and refugee processing, and core national security functions.
- Many of the employees who received RIF notices were placed on extended administrative leave.
- Voluntary resignations and retirements increased the overall workforce loss, leading the Department to roll out a recruitment campaign. ([Federal News Network](#)).

- In May 2026, the State Department told nearly 250 Foreign Service employees and about 30 civil service employees who had been on administrative leave for nearly a year that they have been officially separated from their jobs. ([Federal News Network](#)).
- Affected employees should preserve documents immediately, calendar all deadlines, consider potential Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), Office of Special Counsel (OSC), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), grievance, and reemployment rights, and collect evidence showing whether functions continued elsewhere after positions were abolished.

1. Why the Cuts and Reorganization Matter

State Department employees help protect U.S. citizens, promote U.S. businesses, attract foreign investment, build networks of allies and partners, represent U.S. interests in international organizations, and use diplomacy to prevent wars and resolve conflicts. In addition to the number of employees lost, this reorganization risks weakening the professional, nonpartisan civil service expertise that allows the Department to carry out statutory and mission-critical functions.

The same concerns arise from the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the transfer or absorption of foreign assistance work into State. For many affected workers and communities, the practical question is whether the United States retains the people and expertise needed to carry out foreign affairs, development, humanitarian, and national security work.

Public services for Americans abroad

Experienced personnel and functioning administrative systems are integral to consular operations, passport processing, travel warnings and alerts, emergency assistance, evacuation support, and regional capacity. Even where core consular operations were nominally preserved, reductions in regional support offices are likely to strain already-overburdened systems, leading to slower service and limited capacity during emergencies. ([Government Executive](#), [Federal News Network](#)).

Loss of specialized national security and economic expertise

The cuts signal the U.S. is retreating from the world stage at a time when we should be investing in our diplomatic corps. The layoffs and reorganizations will affect experts in a variety of areas, including national security, international negotiations, conflict stabilization, counterterrorism, disease control, regional affairs, technology, and other security functions that will take years to rebuild. ([Politico](#), [The Dispatch](#)).

Weakened conflict prevention, anti-trafficking, and rule-of-law capacity

Offices that monitor instability, trafficking, corruption, and human rights help identify risks before they become threats to U.S. security or interests. Many of the RIFs targeted these offices and some were reportedly cut entirely. ([Reuters](#), [Federal News Network](#)).

Reduced ability to manage lawful migration and refugee flows

Programs addressing refugee admissions, relocation, and humanitarian protection help the United States manage migration through lawful and orderly channels, protect people who assisted U.S. missions, and maintain credibility with partners. Almost all the offices and programs addressing refugee admissions were shuttered. As a result, the capacity for the U.S. to control refugee flow and strategically protect allies has been gutted. ([CBS News](#), [Federal News Network](#)).

Less access to educational, cultural, and public diplomacy programs

Offices central to U.S. soft power were among the hardest hit. Exchange, fellowship, internship, cultural, and visitor programs help Americans study, work, and represent the United States abroad, while building relationships with future global leaders. Cuts to these programs reduce long-term U.S. influence and opportunities for the American public. ([Federal News Network](#), [WOLA](#)).

In short, these cuts weaken America's capacity, credibility, preparedness, and prosperity at a time of significant global instability. They also raise serious questions about whether the Department followed the rules designed to protect employees, preserve institutional expertise, and ensure that reorganizations are real rather than pretextual.

2. What Is a RIF?

A RIF is the elimination of positions because of factors such as reorganization, lack of work, shortage of funds, insufficient personnel ceiling, or shifting agency needs. A RIF is different from a performance-based or conduct-based removal. In a lawful RIF, the focus is on the position, functions, and retention rules, not whether the employee did a good job or engaged in misconduct.

- Civil Service RIFs at State must follow government-wide OPM regulations in [5 C.F.R. Part 351](#) and State-specific implementing guidance in [3 FAM 2530](#) (last updated May 24, 2025).
- Foreign Service RIFs are governed by the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and State Department procedures, including [3 FAM 2580](#) (last updated June 23, 2025). Career and career-candidate Foreign Service members may have Merit Systems Protection Board appeal rights under 22 U.S.C. § 4010a.

- A RIF may lead to separation, demotion, reassignment, or a furlough of more than 30 calendar days or more than 22 discontinuous workdays.
- Employees on active military duty, veterans' preference, or with restoration rights may have additional protections and should seek individualized advice.
- The fact that an agency calls something a "reorganization" or "RIF" does not by itself make it lawful. Affected employees may challenge whether the agency followed the required procedures, used accurate data, respected transfer-of-function rules, and acted for lawful reasons.

Note. The Supreme Court's July 8, 2025 stay in [*Trump v. Am. Fed. of Gov't Employees*](#) allowed the administration to proceed with some RIFs while litigation continued, but the Court expressly did not decide whether any specific agency RIF or reorganization plan was lawful. Employees should not assume that this decision means their individual RIF was valid.

3. How RIF Procedures Work for State Department Employees

Civil Service RIF procedures

Civil Service RIFs must follow 5 C.F.R. Part 351 and 3 FAM 2530. Key concepts include:

- Competitive area: the organizational and geographic boundaries within which employees compete for retention. It must be defined by both organizational unit and location and generally include all employees in that area.
- Competitive level: a grouping of positions in the same competitive area that are similar enough in grade, series, duties, qualifications, pay schedule, and working conditions that the agency could reassign an employee to another position in the level without undue interruption.
- Retention register: the ranked list of employees in a competitive level who compete with one another for retention.
- Tenure groups: broad categories based on type of appointment and tenure. In general, lower-tenure groups are released before higher-tenure groups.
- Retention standing: the ranking determined by tenure, veterans' preference, length of service, and performance credit. Agencies must apply the rules uniformly and consistently.
- Assignment rights: in some circumstances, a released employee may have rights to "bump" or "retreat" to another position for which they qualify.
- Transfer of function: if continuing work moves from one competitive area to another, the agency may have to transfer employees with the function before conducting a RIF tied to that transfer.

Foreign Service RIF procedures

Foreign Service RIF rules are different. The Foreign Service Act authorizes the Secretary of State to conduct Foreign Service RIFs and prescribe regulations for career and career-candidate members of the Service. The rules consider factors such as organizational changes, documented knowledge, skills, competencies, tenure, and documented performance. Affected Foreign Service members should consult the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), counsel, and the applicable Foreign Affairs Manual provisions.

Key concepts include:

- Competition group: the members in a competitive area who compete with one another for retention.
- Retention register/composite score: the system used to rank employees based on applicable Foreign Service retention factors, which may include tenure, veterans' preference, language proficiency, promotion board scores, and service computation date tie-breakers.
- MSPB rights: career or career-candidate Foreign Service members affected by a RIF may have MSPB appeal rights under 22 U.S.C. § 4010a.

4. Your Rights and Options

Do not wait to understand and exercise your rights. Deadlines may run from the effective date of the RIF action. Some paths can be mutually exclusive, especially for bargaining-unit employees covered by negotiated grievance procedures. Get advice before filing in more than one forum.

MSPB appeal: Many employees separated, downgraded, or furloughed for more than 30 days by a RIF can appeal to the MSPB. The default MSPB deadline for most appeals is 30 calendar days after the effective date of the action, or 30 calendar days after receipt of the agency decision, whichever is later. Review your notice and seek advice immediately.

OSC complaint: If you believe the RIF was used to retaliate against whistleblowing, protected activity, exercise of appeal or grievance rights, refusal to violate the law, or other prohibited personnel practice, you may file with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel. OSC can investigate and, in appropriate cases, seek corrective action or a stay.

EEO process: If you believe discrimination played a role—such as discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or protected EEO activity, contact an EEO counselor promptly. Federal-sector EEO counseling deadlines are often very short.

Union assistance: Employees covered by a union may have rights under a collective bargaining agreement, including grievance-arbitration, and may be able to access free or reduced-cost assistance coordinated through their union. Most State Department employees are eligible to join a union: AFGE Local 1534 for civil service employees and AFSA for Foreign Service employees. Talk to your union before choosing a forum or representative.

Reemployment and placement rights: Separated career and career-conditional employees may have rights to register on the [Reemployment Priority List \(RPL\) or other priority-placement programs](#). These rights often require timely registration and active applications.

Free or low-cost legal support: the [Rise Up: Federal Workers Legal Defense Network](#) and unions may be able to provide consultations, referrals, or representation. Even a short consultation can help you preserve deadlines and choose the right forum.

Possible Remedies

Appealing a RIF does not necessarily mean you are asking only to return to your old job. Depending on the forum, claims, and facts, possible remedies may include cancellation or correction of the RIF action, reinstatement, placement into a proper position, back pay, restoration of leave and benefits, corrected personnel records, priority placement, attorney fees where available, or other relief. The available remedies depend on the claim and forum.

5. Potential Grounds for Challenging a State Department RIF

The strongest arguments will depend on your notice, office, competitive area, position description, personnel records, bargaining-unit status, and what happened to your functions after the RIF. The examples below are issue-spotters, not a substitute for legal advice.

Improper or pretextual basis for the RIF

An agency has discretion to reorganize, but a RIF must be based on lawful grounds and implemented through the required procedures. Evidence that identical or substantially similar functions continued, were transferred elsewhere, were contracted out, or were advertised soon after the RIF may support an argument that the RIF was not a lawful elimination of work.

Failure to follow transfer-of-function rules

If work moved from one competitive area to another and continued in the gaining area, affected employees may have arguments that the transfer should have occurred before the RIF, with employees identified and transferred under 5 C.F.R. Part 351. Evidence that your duties are now being performed by another office, bureau, or newly hired employee can be important.

Improper competitive areas or competitive levels

A narrowly drawn competitive area or level can determine who competes and who is separated. Potential issues include office-by-office competitive areas that do not reflect the real organization, failure to include similarly situated employees, or competitive levels that ignore actual duties and position descriptions.

Errors in retention standing or the retention register

Employees may challenge inaccurate tenure dates, veterans' preference, service computation dates, performance credit, appointment status, competitive level placement, language scoring, or other data used to rank employees.

Failure to provide required notice, information, or reassignment rights

Employees may have arguments if the agency failed to provide timely, accurate information, did not respond to requests for retention-register or competitive-area information, omitted appeal rights, or failed to consider required assignment, bump, retreat, placement, or reemployment rights.

Discrimination, retaliation, or other prohibited personnel practices

A RIF may be unlawful if it was used as a pretext for discrimination, whistleblower retaliation, retaliation for exercising appeal or grievance rights, political coercion or discrimination, veterans' preference violations, or other prohibited personnel practices.

6. What to Do If You're Affected

You are not alone. Civil Service Strong, the Partnership for Public Service, AFGE, and partner organizations are working to support affected workers across legal, career, and emotional dimensions.

Exit and Evidence Checklist

1. Save your RIF notice, decision letter, SF-50s, position description, performance ratings, awards, service computation date records, veterans' preference documentation, reasonable accommodation records, and any correspondence about your office, position, or duties.
2. Calendar every deadline listed in your notice. If unsure, assume the shortest deadline may apply until counsel confirms otherwise.
3. Request and preserve information about your competitive area, competitive level, retention register, tenure group, veterans' preference, service computation date, performance credit, assignment rights, and reemployment rights.
4. Preserve evidence of transfer of function: reorganization charts, office closure notices, emails assigning your duties elsewhere, new office descriptions, vacancy announcements, contractor

solicitations, statements that your work will continue, or examples of your former work being performed by others.

5. Monitor USAJobs, SAM.gov, agency vacancy announcements, contractor postings, and internal announcements for positions or contracts performing the same or substantially similar functions that were supposedly abolished.

6. Keep a timeline of what happened, including dates of notices, meetings, information requests, unanswered emails, proposed transfers, changes to duties, and communications with HR or managers.

7. Identify whether you are in a bargaining unit and contact your union quickly about negotiated grievance procedures, information requests, and other rights.

8. Consider legal support through [Rise Up](#), your union, or counsel before filing in [MSPB](#), OSC, EEO, or a negotiated grievance process.

9. Register promptly [for RPL or other reemployment and placement programs](#) for which you may be eligible.

10. Apply for [unemployment benefits](#) if separated, and keep documentation required by your state unemployment office.

11. Do not remove nonpublic government records or classified/sensitive information. Preserve only documents you are authorized to possess and ask counsel about any uncertainty.

Questions to Ask When You Talk to a Lawyer or Union Representative

- What is my appeal or complaint filing deadline, and what event triggered it?
- Which forum should I use: MSPB, OSC, EEO, a negotiated grievance procedure, or another path?
- Was my competitive area or competitive level properly defined?
- Were my retention factors accurate?
- Did my functions transfer before or after the RIF and should I have transferred with them?
- Are there signs of discrimination, retaliation, political motivation, or another prohibited personnel practice?
- What remedies do I want: reinstatement, placement, back pay, corrected records, benefits, priority placement, or another remedy?

7. Helpful Resources

Legal and employee-rights support

- [Rise Up: Federal Workers Legal Defense Network](#)
- [Civil Service Strong Resource Library](#)
- [AFGE Local 1534](#)
- [MSPB: How to File an Appeal](#)
- [OSC: File a Complaint](#)
- [OPM: Reductions in Force](#)
- [OPM: Reemployment Priority List / workforce restructuring resources](#)

Other helpful resources:

- [CSS RIF Action Checklist](#)
- [Preparing for a Reduction in Force: 12 Things Every Fed Should Do Right Now](#)
- [Virtual Go Bag](#)

Career and transition support

- [FedsForward](#)
- [Work for America](#)
- [Coaching Collaborative](#)
- [Partnership for Public Service FedSupport Hub](#)
- [Pivot with Purpose at Georgetown University](#)

Well-being and peer support

- [Agency Employee Assistance Programs \(EAPs\) – confidential counseling](#)
- [Public Service Alliance mental health platform](#)
- [Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund \(FEEA\) mental health support](#)

Unemployment Insurance

- [Civil Service Strong's State-by-State Guide: Unemployment Benefits & Other Resources for Former Federal Employees](#)
- Reference: [CareerOneStop](#) & [U.S. Department of Labor: How Do I File for Unemployment Insurance?](#)

State Department-specific references

- [3 FAM 2530: Reduction-in-Force, Civil Service](#)
- [3 FAM 2580: Reduction-in-Force, Foreign Service](#)
- [3 FAM 2940: Reemployment Priority List](#)
- [Department of State FAQs for Employees Separated via a RIF Action July 11, 2025](#)

- The State Department has a website with many helpful links and documents to official resources for RIF'd or separated employees [here](#).
- The American Foreign Service Association has many helpful resources [here](#).

8. How We're Fighting Back

Civil Service Strong, the Partnership for Public Service, AFGE, and partner organizations are working to defend affected workers and the public's interest in an effective, lawful, nonpartisan civil service. This work includes:

- Litigating [unlawful RIFs and reorganizations](#) in court and administrative forums;
- Providing [federal worker webinars](#) and [resources](#) on legal, career, and emotional support;
- Connecting workers to legal consultations and representation through [Rise Up](#) and [partner networks](#);
- Amplifying civil servant voices and helping workers share their stories;
- Advocating for reforms to restore and strengthen an effective civil service.

You Are Not Alone

"Federal employees serve our nation with dedication and integrity. As we litigate multiple cases where the workforce has been unlawfully targeted, we want to make sure that people know they are not alone as they face the threat of job loss. The You Are Not Alone Project is about more than resources—it's about solidarity, dignity, and ensuring public servants have the tools they need to protect their rights and move forward."

— Rob Shriver, Managing Director of Democracy Forward's Civil Service Strong and Good Government Initiatives

"These dramatic job losses across critical government programs aren't just numbers on a page—these are real people, with families, mortgages, and careers built in service to the American people. Our union won't stand by while these patriotic citizens are cast aside. We are proud to partner with Civil Service Strong and Democracy Forward on the You Are Not Alone Project to ensure every public servant knows their rights, gets the support they deserve, and understands AFGE will be with them every step of the way."

— Everett Kelley, National President of AFGE

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