

Calls for US Investigation into Harvard Legacy Admissions Practices Grow



Harvard University is facing accusations from minority groups, alleging that the prestigious institution has violated federal law by giving preferential treatment to children of alumni and wealthy donors in its admissions process. The complaint comes just days after the US Supreme Court ruled against using race-based affirmative action policies.

The long-standing practice of legacy admissions at Harvard has drawn criticism for flouting a provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits racial discrimination in programs that receive federal funds. In a filing with the US Department of Education on Monday, the groups behind the complaint highlighted that approximately 70% of legacy admissions at Harvard are White.

According to the complaint, Harvard College grants special preference to hundreds of mostly White students each year solely based on their family connections rather than their accomplishments. The minority groups seek a thorough investigation into Harvard's use of donor and legacy preferences and demand that the institution ends the practice to avoid losing federal funds. Additionally, they urge Harvard to ensure that applicants with family ties are unable to identify themselves during the admissions process.

The complaint emerges at a time when the United States is grappling with the aftermath of the Supreme Court's ruling, which effectively ended affirmative action policies that universities have used to promote diversity in their campuses after years of racially discriminatory admissions practices. Harvard has been a staunch defender of affirmative action and stated its commitment to finding alternative ways to ensure diversity.

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Harvard declined to provide a comment regarding the complaint.

During the Supreme Court arguments in October, Justice Neil Gorsuch suggested the elimination of legacy preferences, which grant an advantage to children of alumni, athletes, and major donors. However, colleges have been reluctant to abandon such preferences due to their role in maintaining donor satisfaction.

While the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has long held a policy against legacy admissions, only a few other selective colleges, including Amherst College and Johns Hopkins University, have adopted similar practices.

The Chica Project, the African Community Economic Development of New England, and the Greater Boston Latino Network filed the complaint. The groups denounce the legacy admissions practice as an unfair and undeserved benefit solely based on an applicant's family background.

Ivan Espinoza-Madrigal, executive director of Lawyers for Civil Rights, which represents the groups, emphasized that family name and financial status should not be considered as merit in college admissions. He stated, "Your family's last name and the size of your bank account are not a measure of merit and should have no bearing on the college admissions process."

The Supreme Court ruling originated from a lawsuit filed by Students for Fair Admissions, an organization opposed to preferences in admissions, led by former stockbroker Ed Blum. Blum highlighted his organization's previous statement, asserting that the elimination of legacy practices at Harvard is long overdue.

The complaint argues that Harvard, as a recipient of substantial federal funds, is bound by landmark civil rights laws that prohibit practices leading to unjustified disparate impact based on race.

In anticipation of the Supreme Court ruling, a study conducted by Georgetown University in March urged selective colleges to eliminate their legacy policies. The study, titled "Race, Elite College Admissions, and the Court," argued that doing so would help these universities maintain their limited levels of diversity.

As the accusations against Harvard unfold, the outcome of the complaint and its potential impact on legacy admissions practices at the university will be closely watched, highlighting the ongoing debate surrounding fairness and equal opportunity in college admissions.

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