# Harvard professor sues NIH over abrupt termination of LGBTQ mental health research funding



An associate professor at Harvard Medical School has initiated legal action against the National Institutes of Health (NIH) following the abrupt termination of her research funding. The grant, designed to investigate the mental health impacts of discriminatory and supportive legislation on young LGBTQ individuals, was cut in March, bringing to a halt a project that involved a research team of 18 people and raising concerns about the futures and safety of her colleagues and students.

Dr Brittany Charlton, who also serves as an associate professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and is the founding director of the LGBTQ Health Center of Excellence, filed the lawsuit earlier this month in federal court. The funding loss follows more than 15 years of successful grant awards and was centred on an NIH R61 grant that aimed to address “time-sensitive policy questions” regarding how LGBTQ-related policies, including religious exemptions, healthcare bans, and curriculum restrictions or supports, affect the mental health of LGBTQ youth transitioning into adulthood.

The termination of this funding is unusual; Charlton highlighted in the lawsuit that she had received $4.15 million to launch the project in August 2024. She noted that after a no-cost, two-month extension was granted until April, the NIH unexpectedly inform her in March that the funding was ended, stating: “This award no longer effectuates agency priorities.” The NIH expressed scepticism towards research focused on gender identity, describing such projects as often “unscientific” and lacking clear benefits to health outcomes.

Charlton said she was given no prior indication of any issues with her grant, and attempts to seek clarification from her program officer and their supervisor were met with silence. When Charlton spoke directly with a program officer, she was told they had never seen such terminations before and found it difficult to understand how anonymous reviewers unfamiliar with the project could conclude that “no corrective action is possible” or that the research conflicted with agency priorities. She described the process of applying for the grant as “intense and compressed,” requiring her to set aside personal and professional commitments to secure the five-year funding.

As a result of the funding cut, Charlton has lost her own salary and the salaries of the entire team working under the grant. One senior team member has already been let go, and she is concerned about future terminations affecting master’s and doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty, and staff, many of whom relocated or made major life decisions to support the research. The termination has had serious personal and professional repercussions; for example, one student took medical leave for mental health reasons and may not return to their field, and another team member took leave due to the stress caused by the unexpected loss of funding.

One team member confided fears about their safety, questioning whether there is “a place for people like me” in the country. Charlton emphasised the broader significance of the terminations: “When science is silenced by ideology, we all lose.” The lawsuit argues that suppressing research on marginalised communities for political reasons not only impacts individual careers but also threatens the future of medical and public health leadership and compromises the integrity of science broadly.

Charlton's case brings to light tensions around funding for LGBTQ-focused research, particularly those addressing mental health in young populations. The termination of her grant reflects a contentious stance by an agency that historically funds a wide range of health research but is now reportedly deprioritising work related to gender identity.

The lawsuit is ongoing, and it highlights a critical debate over how scientific research on sensitive social issues is supported or curtailed by governmental agencies. The outcome may have implications for the future availability of funding for studies focusing on the health and well-being of LGBTQ individuals and could affect the career trajectories of researchers and students engaged in this field.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/scientist-speaks-after-nih-terminates-grants-including-study/story?id=120020702> - This article confirms that Dr. Brittany Charlton, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and founding director of the LGBTQ Health Center of Excellence, had her NIH grants terminated abruptly in March 2025, including a multi-million dollar grant to study mental health impacts of LGBTQ-related policies. It details the NIH’s rationale describing such research on gender identity as often 'unscientific' and conflicting with agency priorities, which aligns with the article’s claims about the termination and NIH’s stated reasons.
2. <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/4/3/brittany-charlton-nih-lawsuit/> - This source provides detailed information on the lawsuit filed by Dr. Charlton against the NIH, corroborating that the termination of her funding affected a research team of 18 people, led to loss of salaries including her own, and forced staff layoffs. It also discusses the political nature of the termination and the significant professional and personal consequences highlighted in the article.
3. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/science-research-policy/2025/04/02/researchers-higher-ed-union-fight-nih-grant> - Inside Higher Ed reports on the legal challenge involving Dr. Charlton, confirming her role as founding director of Harvard’s LGBTQ Health Center of Excellence and her efforts to fight the NIH grant terminations. This supports the article's depiction of longstanding successful funding abruptly ended and the broader fight within the research and higher education community.
4. <https://www.science.org/content/article/lawsuit-aims-broadly-overturn-nih-s-grant-terminations> - The Science magazine article explains that the lawsuit filed by Charlton and others targets several NIH grant terminations, including five grants related to LGBTQ adolescent reproductive health research. This source supports the claim that the terminations represent a significant setback to scientific research on marginalized communities and aligns with the article’s focus on the scientific and political tensions involved.
5. <https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/researchers-challenge-nih-s-politically-driven-grant-cancellations> - This news release from the American Public Health Association details the challenge against NIH's politically motivated grant cancellations, including Dr. Charlton's case. It corroborates that the funding cuts have broad implications for public health research on LGBTQ issues, supporting the article’s emphasis on how political ideology is impacting science funding and research integrity.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - The original source of the article provides the full context of Dr. Charlton’s legal action against the NIH, the sudden ending of a $4.15 million R61 grant, and the emotional and professional toll on her research team, supporting all major claims made about the funding termination, lawsuit details, and the controversy surrounding research on LGBTQ mental health.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMigwFBVV95cUxObmlKQWhTT0wtaFo1R1Y4YVdaU1p4czRUTTVMTWx4UW10bzdzZ24yd1l6bzZ1TUtRaG9EdTZfNUtqWkRCT3lFYndTLXQzOGNnRTBDajc5ZndjT3hURFJwMWhRcjhoYkQtVDQxdTVTNG0wbVBqUThMdHlydm9TNXVLTzNZaw?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data