# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Department of education

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| **OVERVIEW** |
| Senate Committee | Health, Education, Labor and Pensions |
| Agency Mission | To promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access |
| Position Overview | The assistant secretary for civil rights has the primary focus of protecting civil rights in federally assisted education programs, and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, age or membership in patriotic youth organizations.[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Compensation | Level IV $155,500 (5 U.S.C. § 5315)[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| Position Reports to | The Secretary of Education  |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. These civil rights laws enforced by OCR extend to all state education agencies, elementary and secondary school systems, colleges and universities, vocational schools, proprietary schools, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, libraries, and museums that receive Department of Education funds.[[3]](#endnote-3) The assistant secretary provides overall direction and leadership for the offices of policy, strategic operations and outreach, and enforcement.In fiscal 2016, the Office of Civil Rights had a budget of $106 million and 577 nonseasonal, full-time permanent employees.[[4]](#endnote-4) |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Conducts investigations and negotiations to secure voluntary compliance, and initiates administrative enforcement proceedings to secure compliance with legislative and regulatory civil rights requirements
* Resolves complaints of discrimination made to OCR
* Provides technical assistance to help institutions achieve voluntary compliance with the civil rights laws that OCR enforces
* Uses partnerships to develop creative approaches to prevent and address discrimination in implementing technical assistance
* Develops and recommends the adoption of regulations and policies of general applicability regarding civil rights
* Conducts research and surveys on civil rights issues and on the participation of minorities, women, the aged and persons with disabilities in federally assisted education programs
* Advises the secretary on civil rights
* Advises and assists recipients of departmental funding to understand their responsibilities consistent with statutory and regulatory requirements
* Advises and assists beneficiaries of programs and activities that receive departmental funding to understand their rights consistent with statutory and regulatory provisions
* Engages and responds to civil rights stakeholders and the media on civil rights issues
* Makes an annual report to the secretary, the president and Congress summarizing the compliance and enforcement activities of OCR, and identifies significant civil rights or compliance problems that, according to the recommendation of the office, need corrective action and, according to the assistant secretary, have not made adequate progress
* Coordinates the collection of data necessary to ensure compliance with civil rights laws within the jurisdiction of OCR
* Selects, appoints and employs such officers and employees, including staff attorneys, as may be necessary to carry out the functions of the office
* Enters into contracts and other arrangements for audits, studies, analyses and other services, with public agencies, private organizations and persons, and makes the necessary payments to carry out the office’s compliance and enforcement functions (20 U.S.C. § 3413)
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Currently admitted member of the bar and held in good standing (preferred)
* Demonstrated knowledge of the inner workings of the civil rights community
* Demonstrated reputation among and familiarity with leaders of the civil rights community, and proven ability to navigate within that community effectively
* Demonstrated knowledge of the civil rights laws under OCR’s jurisdiction, including signification pending litigation
* Knowledge of Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights programs and initiatives
* Experience in managing a large organization, with a track record of leading teams successfully
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| Competencies | * Demonstrated ability to collaborate extensively with external and internal stakeholders (including civil rights offices in other federal agencies), as well as design and implement a strategic visions for a high-performing organization
* Demonstrated ability to engage and respond to the media
* Outstanding communication and writing skills, including strong public speaking skills, and the ability to communicate persuasively and empathetically
* Exceptional judgment and vision
* Problem-solving ability, offering creative solutions to major problems
* Proven leadership and success in the effective implementation of performance improvement initiatives, such as customer service improvement and performance management
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| **PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Catherine E. Lhamon (2013 to 2017): Director of Impact Litigation at Public Council; Assistant Legal Director at the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California; Teaching Fellow and Supervising Attorney, Georgetown University Law Center[[5]](#endnote-5) |
| Russlynn Ali (2009 to 2012): Vice President of the Education Trust; California Governor’s Advisory Committee Appointee on Education Excellence; Curriculum and Instruction Committee Appointee of the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education[[6]](#endnote-6) |
| Stephanie J. Monroe (2005 to 2008): Professional Staff Member for the Senate Budget Committee; Chief Counsel for the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions; Chief Counsel and Minority Staff Director of the former Senate Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on Children, Family, Drugs and Alcoholism[[7]](#endnote-7) |

1. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials at 2013 levels during calendar year 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/aboutocr.html [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget17/summary/17summary.pdf>

Partnership for Public Service analysis of Fedscope data [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/asstsec/ocr-as01.html [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. http://www2.ed.gov/news/staff/bios/ali.html [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.bcps.org/students/alumni/smonroe\_full\_bio.html [↑](#endnote-ref-7)