

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS,

and

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF
TEACHERS,

Plaintiffs,

v.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
JUSTICE, *et al.*,

Defendants.

Case No. 1:25-cv-02429-MKV

Declaration of Alex de
Sherbinin
(Witness L)

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

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PROFESSORS,

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Defendants.

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DECLARATION OF ALEX DE SHERBININ

I, Alex de Sherbinin, hereby declare as follows:

1. I am the Director of the Center for Integrated Earth System Information (CIESIN), a research unit of the Columbia Climate School at Columbia University. I have worked at CIESIN since 1999. I also regularly teach students at the Climate School.
2. I have personal knowledge of the facts set forth in this declaration, and if called as a witness in this action, I could and would testify competently to these facts.
3. Since 1998, CIESIN has had a contract with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to run one of twelve data centers known as Distributed Active Archive Centers (DAACs). The general purpose of these data centers is to process, archive, and distribute different types of earth science data, as well as to create data sets for and provide support to researchers at NASA and elsewhere.

4. NASA selected CIESIN to run the Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC), the data center that focuses specifically on data relating to human interactions in the environment.

5. SEDAC provides unique global and regional data products and services in five major areas: population and settlements; climate mitigation and adaptation; environmental sustainability; natural hazards; and poverty and food security. SEDAC's flagship data product is the Gridded Population of the World, which is a global map that models the distribution of the human population across the world. This map can be integrated with other data sets (*e.g.*, data on air pollution), allowing for a greater understanding of the impact of issues like air pollution on public health. SEDAC also created a gridded version of the U.S. Social Vulnerability Index, a data set that helps assess the ability of counties in the United States to prepare for, respond to, and recover from environmental hazards.

6. SEDAC's data products have been used widely, both in academic research and in real-world decision-making and applications. Roughly 700 academic journal articles per year cite SEDAC data, with many using our data to understand the ways that humans are affected by, or contributing to, environmental change. As far as real-world applications, disaster managers have used SEDAC data to help estimate the population in communities affected by natural disasters, such as hurricanes, major flooding, and wildfires. Understanding the precise population distribution can help emergency managers identify the appropriate size of the emergency response, as well as the appropriate locations to send utility trucks and other forms of emergency assistance.

7. CIESIN's most recent contract with NASA was a five-year contract for more than \$5 million a year (for a total contract value of nearly \$30 million). There were 3.5 years left on this contract.

8. CIESIN's contract with NASA has paid for the salaries of the 25 people who worked on SEDAC on either a full- or part-time basis. These individuals have unique skills and

specialized knowledge in the technical areas relevant to running a data repository, including the development and processing of data.

9. On March 7, 2025, CIESIN received a stop-work order from NASA instructing us to cease work on SEDAC. Although we did not receive a formal termination letter from NASA until April 30, 2025, it is my understanding that the original stop-work order was issued as part of the government's termination of \$400 million in grants and contracts to Columbia. Neither the stop-work order nor the termination letter we received gave a specific reason for the termination.

10. I have learned that CIESIN's contract with NASA appeared on a March 3, 2025 list of contracts identified for potential stop-work orders by Josh Gruenbaum, the Commissioner of the Federal Acquisition Service in the General Services Administration. *See* ECF No. 93-1. The contract number is 80GSFC23CA001, and the amount of the contract is \$29,953,052.00.

11. The loss of the SEDAC contract will be devastating for the tremendously dedicated staff at CIESIN. Because the contract has been terminated, CIESIN has had to notify 17 of the 25 people who have worked on SEDAC that they will be losing their positions.

12. The loss of the contract also means SEDAC will no longer be able to perform the important services it has performed for more than 25 years—including updating the data, developing new data sets and products, curating data from third-party developers, and ensuring the data are archived and distributed in accordance with best practices. This will have real-world consequences, given the range of practical applications for which SEDAC data have been used.

13. Because the contract has been terminated, NASA removed all SEDAC data from its Earthdata catalog in early April 2025. Since public access was interrupted, CIESIN invested substantial effort in identifying an appropriate open repository and has begun the process of moving the data to that repository. Until that happens, CIESIN has made the data catalog available on a webpage to provide minimal access for its user community and attempted to publicize it, but it is likely that many researchers and others who rely on the data do not know where to find them. The current catalog is a Google sheet with very limited functionality for

data search and discovery. In the month or so since the data were removed from the NASA catalog, I have heard from many SEDAC data users who relied on the data and were concerned it would no longer be available.

14. I have no reason to believe the termination of the SEDAC contract had anything to do with CIESIN's performance. SEDAC is rated each year by NASA's Earth Observing System Data and Information System (EOSDIS), and it has generally received exceptional ratings. SEDAC also has a strong reputation among the communities we serve.

15. In my experience, the government's actions terminating millions of dollars in federal funds have affected the campus environment. I have found people are more cautious and guarded about expressing their views, due to concerns that particular words may be taken out of context and used against them.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on this 29th day of May 2025.



Alex de Sherbinin