



By: TA | AP Insight

Resignations and firings have depleted the FBI and Justice Department



The FBI and Justice Department are scrambling to rebuild a depleted workforce after a **wave of departures** over the past year, with leaders easing hiring requirements and accelerating recruitment in ways that some current and former officials see as a lowering of long-accepted standards.

The FBI has turned to social media campaigns to attract applicants, offered abbreviated training for candidates from other federal agencies and relaxed requirements for support staff seeking to become agents, according to people familiar with the changes and internal communications seen by The Associated Press.

At the same time, the Justice Department has opened the door to hiring prosecutors right out of law school to help fill vacancies in U.S. attorney's offices across the country.

Some current and former agents also say the FBI is promoting into positions of leadership employees with less experience than would be customary for the jobs.

The moves reflect a broader effort to stabilize a workforce strained by retirements and resignations prompted in part by concerns over the Trump administration's politicization of the department, along with the **firings of lawyers**, agents and other employees deemed insufficiently loyal to the Republican president's agenda.

Critics of the changes say they amount to a reduction in standards for a law enforcement institution that has long prided itself on professional expertise and is responsible for everything from **preventing terrorist attacks** to building complex public corruption prosecutions.

"It's a sign of, among other things, the difficulty the department is having right now in keeping and recruiting people," said Greg Brower, a former U.S. attorney in Nevada who left the FBI in 2018 as its chief congressional liaison.

The FBI defended the changes as a necessary modernization of its hiring pipeline, saying it is

streamlining, not lowering, standards and removing what it says were "bureaucratic" steps in the application process. It said applicants were still evaluated "on the same competencies."

"The Bureau holds high standards for potential and current employees, and there is a rigorous application and background process to join the FBI," the FBI said in a statement.

Waived requirements in some cases to become an FBI agent

The FBI has long been seen as the nation's premier federal law enforcement agency, with a recruitment process anchored around physical fitness tests, a writing assessment, interview and training academy at Quantico, Virginia.

Elements of the regimen have been periodically tweaked to fit the bureau's needs, including over the past year under the leadership of FBI Director Kash Patel.

With a mantra to "let good cops be cops," Patel announced last fall that transfers from other agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Administration would be able to complete a nine-week training academy instead of the traditional academy that spans more than four months.

The change rankled some current and former officials who say the FBI's protocols, professional culture and diversity of cases it handles help to distinguish it from other agencies.

For support staff employees looking to become agents, the bureau more recently said it would waive requirements of a written assessment and an interview with a three-member panel of FBI agents meant to assess life experience and judgment, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the moves and an internal written message seen by the AP.

The FBI said onboard employees would still need recommendations from a senior leader and to complete Quantico training.

“We are not lowering standards or removing qualifications in any way. What we are doing is streamlining the process to remove duplicative, bureaucratic steps to the application system for onboard employees,” the FBI said in a statement, adding, “These are changes based on a wide variety of feedback from successful agents with over 20 years’ experience.”



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Patel boasted in January of a 112% increase in applications, and the FBI says it has a “clear path” to add around 700 special agents this year and that its current Quantico class is one of its largest in years.

But some people familiar with the matter say an applications uptick does not necessarily correspond to a surge in high-caliber recruits that can offset the attrition the bureau has endured.

At the other end of the employment spectrum, the FBI also faces turnover among senior leaders, including special agents in charge, the title given to leaders of most of the bureau's 56 field offices.

Some were fired by Patel over the past year and others retired. Many offices are now led by someone who has been in the job for under a year.

Facing what current and former officials say is difficulty in filling some of the positions, the FBI has moved quickly to promote agents up the ladder, people familiar with the matter say.

That includes elevating assistant special agents in charge to special agents in charge and opening the door for employees to be considered for leadership roles without the significant headquarters experience the FBI historically regarded as necessary for a holistic view of bureau operations.

As a conservative podcast host before becoming director, Patel had talked about shutting down FBI headquarters and transforming it into a museum of the “deep state” and told colleagues on his first day as director that he would move hundreds of employees from Washington into the field.

“As a field agent, you have a field agent’s mentality, you have a field agent's view,” said Chris Piehota, a retired FBI senior executive. Without adequate headquarters experience, he added, you don't know “the business side of the FBI, the logistical side of the FBI or the political jungle” that can accompany the job.

Justice Department changes

The Justice Department, meanwhile, has lowered hiring prerequisites for some federal prosecutors.

Department officials recently suspended a policy that U.S. attorneys offices only hire prosecutors with at least one year of experience practicing law.

The department did not explain the reason, but said in a statement that it is “proud to empower young and passionate prosecutors and offer attorneys at every level the opportunity to invest their talents into keeping their communities safe.”

It comes as parts of the agency are struggling to keep up with the workload amid critical staffing shortages, with the department recently acknowledging that it has lost nearly

1,000 assistant U.S. attorneys.



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In Minnesota, for example, the **federal prosecutors' office** has been gutted by resignations amid frustration with the administration's stepped-up immigration enforcement and the department's response to fatal shootings of civilians by federal agents.

Justice Department headquarters in Washington has endured staffing losses, too.

The number of lawyers in the Criminal Division's Violent Crime and Racketeering Section, which prosecutes organized crime groups and violent gangs, is down significantly, though the section is looking to hire additional attorneys.

A National Security Division section that works espionage cases has reported a 40% drop in prosecutors.

The department said in a statement that it has seen an increase in criminal complaints and indictments despite a loss in prosecutors, underscoring the "bloated, ineffective and weaponized" institution it says the administration inherited.

Officials have enlisted military lawyers to serve as special prosecutors in some offices. The administration has also used social media to recruit applicants.

One recent post from the FBI's Omaha, Nebraska office said: "A calling bigger than yourself. A mission that matters. If you're

ready for the challenge, there's a place for you on the FBI team."

Chad Mizelle, who served as chief of staff to Trump's first attorney general, Pam Bondi, recently urged lawyers to contact him on X if they want to become prosecutors, "and support President Trump and anti-crime agenda."

Mizelle's post raised eyebrows not only because federal prosecutors have not generally been solicited over social media, but also because support for the president has not been a prerequisite for career employees.

"We need good prosecutors," wrote Mizelle, who left the department in October. "And DOJ is hiring across the country. Now is your chance to join the mission and do good for our country."