

BIOCHEMICAL RESEARCH CHALLENGES ABRUPT, UNEXPLAINED TERMINATION OF HIS IMMIGRATION STATUS

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**ACLU
SC**

**ACLU-SC Legal Director
Allen Chaney:**

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UPDATE, April 18, 6:40 p.m.: A federal judge has issued a 14-day temporary restraining order against the heads of the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Ariwoola’s case. A copy of the judge’s order is available [here](#)

https://www.aclusc.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/250418tro-order.pdf (PDF).

COLUMBIA – Matthew Ariwoola is a fourth-year PhD student at the University of South Carolina (USC), studying ways to make

medications more effective and teaching four undergraduate chemistry courses. Now he faces the threat of arrest and deportation as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has suddenly and unilaterally terminated his F-1 student status. Represented by the ACLU of South Carolina, Ariwoola is challenging this attempt to deport him without any opportunity for due process.

“Matthew is yet another victim of the Trump administration’s haphazard and flagrantly unconstitutional dragnet of our international students,” says **Allen Chaney, Legal Director of the ACLU of South Carolina**. “It’s hard to see how ejecting a hardworking and law-abiding doctoral student is anything but the product of an unmasked hatred of non-Americans. No one is better off if Matthew is deported, no one.”

Ariwoola is one of approximately 1.2 million international students studying at our nation’s colleges and universities, and he is one of over 1,500 students who are suddenly facing unexplained deportation by DHS. International students like Ariwoola enter the U.S. through F-1 student visas, and their nonimmigrant status is monitored through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Once a student is granted an F-1 visa and F-1 status, they are typically permitted to remain in the U.S. as long as they continue to meet requirements such as maintaining a full course of study and avoiding unauthorized employment.

Ariwoola is a 32-year-old citizen of Nigeria. He came to the United States so that he could study, research, and teach chemistry at the University of South Carolina. He is scheduled to graduate this December, and he has been supporting his family through the stipend he receives from his PhD program.

On April 8, 2025, USC staff informed Ariwoola that he was unable to continue studying and teaching due to his immigration status. The only reason that Ariwoola was given: “OTHER – Individual identified

in criminal records check and/or has had their VISA revoked. SEVIS record has been terminated.”

Ariwoola has never been convicted of a crime—not even a traffic ticket. Because he received no explanation for the termination of his SEVIS record, he is left to presume that it was canceled on the basis of his only interaction with American law enforcement: in 2023, Ariwoola was arrested on a Georgia warrant, despite never having been to Georgia and never having had any contact with the accuser. After reviewing the case, the prosecutor dismissed all charges.

The lawsuit makes clear the incredible harm that Ariwoola will face with the termination of his SEVIS record. He will not be able to graduate this year, and he will lose years of important research. He will lose his stipend immediately and be unable to support his family. He won't be able to pay rent and will likely end up homeless next month.

The suit alleges that, because Ariwoola was offered no opportunity to contest the decision, DHS violated his Fifth Amendment due process rights. It also alleges that DHS's actions violate the Administrative Procedure Act. Ariwoola is asking the court to restore his valid F-1 student status so that he can continue to study at USC.