Elon Musk barred from accessing US Treasury payments data

Temporary order restricts efforts of billionaire's Department of Government Efficiency to infiltrate multitrillion dollar system



Representatives of government employees and retirees have sued to stop sensitive data from the Treasury being shared with Elon Musk and others at Doge © AP

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Joe Miller in Washington

A federal judge has barred the US Treasury from handing data from its payments system to outsiders, in an early legal blow to Elon Musk's crusade to slash government spending.

Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly put the temporary order in place after Musk boasted that his team at the Department of Government Efficiency (Doge) was "rapidly shutting down"

Treasury remittances, having apparently gained access to the system that disburses trillions of dollars, including social security payments and Medicare, each year.

Representatives of government employees and retirees have sued to stop the sensitive data being shared with Musk and others at Doge, arguing that such moves were “depriving them of privacy protections guaranteed to them by federal law”.

Although the US government reassured the court that only two of Doge’s emissaries, Cloud Software group chief executive Tom Krause and 25-year-old coder Marko Elez, had access to the sensitive system, Kollar-Kotelly pushed for an order preventing any information being shared outside the Treasury, while she considers a more permanent injunction.

As a result, Musk himself will not be able to review data pulled from the payments system.

The legal challenge comes as Treasury officials and the White House have sought to quell fears over Musk’s and Doge’s purported access to the system, and his broader authority, after the entrepreneur suggested his team was unilaterally cancelling “illegal” payments.

On Monday, Donald Trump said Musk, who has been made a special government employee, “can’t do — and won’t do — anything without our approval”.

Press secretary Karoline Leavitt has also confirmed that Musk would extricate himself from any situations where he might have a conflict: “If Elon Musk comes across a conflict of interest with [his companies’] contracts and the funding that Doge is overseeing, then Elon will excuse himself from those contracts . . . he has abided by all applicable laws.”



Anti-Musk protesters outside the US Department of Labor in Washington on Wednesday © AP

Doge, whose emissaries have infiltrated the networks of various government agencies, including USAID, Health & Human Services and the Department of Transportation, has been sued multiple times by groups claiming the body is circumventing various legal protections.

On Wednesday, labour organisations sought a restraining order to prevent Doge from accessing US Labor Department systems, following reports that the agency was Musk's next target.

"Doge seeks to gain access to sensitive systems before courts can stop them, dismantle agencies before Congress can assert its prerogatives in the federal budget, and intimidate and threaten employees who stand in their way, worrying about the consequences later," the plaintiffs alleged.

A judge will hear arguments on the motion on Friday.

Additional reporting by Steff Chavez in Washington