

Appeals court halts special master review of documents seized at Mar-a-Lago in major defeat for Trump



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Washington, December 2 (RHC)-- In a major defeat for former President Donald Trump, a federal appeals court on Thursday halted a third-party review of documents seized from his Mar-a-Lago estate. The ruling removes a major obstacle to the Justice Department's investigation into the mishandling of government records from Trump's time in the White House.

The three-judge panel of the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals reversed US District Judge Aileen Cannon's order appointing a so-called special master to sort through thousands of documents found at Trump's home to determine what should be off limits to investigators. The court said the judge should not have intervened in the first place.

"The law is clear," the appeals court wrote. "We cannot write a rule that allows any subject of a search warrant to block government investigations after the execution of the warrant. Nor can we write a rule that allows only former presidents to do so."

The 11th Circuit said that either approach would be a "radical reordering of our caselaw limiting the federal courts' involvement in criminal investigations" and that "both would violate bedrock separation-of-powers limitations."

The Justice Department is investigating obstruction of justice, criminal mishandling of government records and violations of the Espionage Act, according to court filings. The probe exploded into public view with the August search, which came after investigators obtained evidence they said led them to believe that Trump had not complied with a subpoena for all documents marked as classified being stored at his Florida home.

The opinion -- which was issued jointly by the three-judge panel made up of all GOP appointees -- dismantled Trump's arguments for why a special master was necessary. The court said that only in extraordinary circumstances should courts intervene in Justice Department investigations that are still in their early stages, and that standard had not been met here.

"This restraint guards against needless judicial intrusion into the course of criminal investigations—a sphere of power committed to the executive branch," the court wrote. The appeals court said that its new ruling will go into effect in seven days, unless a party in the case successfully seeks an order – known as a stay – pausing the ruling from going into effect while it is appealed.

Trump's legal team has not decided whether to appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court but is weighing the option, a source familiar with the discussions told CNN.

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