

How to File a Discrimination Complaint with the Office for Civil Rights

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces five federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability and age in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education (ED). Discrimination on the bases of race, color and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*; sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and Title II of the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* (Title II prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance); and age discrimination is prohibited by the *Age Discrimination Act of 1975*.

These civil rights laws extend to all state education agencies, elementary and secondary school systems, colleges and universities, vocational schools, proprietary schools, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, libraries and museums that receive federal financial assistance from ED. Programs or activities that receive ED funds must provide aids, benefits or services in a nondiscriminatory manner. Such aids, benefits or services may include, but are not limited to, admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student treatment and services, counseling and guidance, discipline, classroom assignment, grading, vocational education, recreation, physical education, athletics, housing and employment.

OCR also enforces the *Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act*, part of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Under this act, OCR can investigate complaints involving the denial of equal access or a fair opportunity to meet to, or discrimination against, any group officially affiliated with the Boy Scouts or affiliated with any other youth group listed in Title 36 of the United States Code, by a public elementary school, a public secondary school, or a state or local education agency that receives funds from ED.

Who Can File a Discrimination Complaint

Anyone who believes that an education institution that receives federal financial assistance has discriminated against someone on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability or age, or who believes that a public elementary or secondary school, or state or local education agency has violated the *Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act*, may file a complaint. The person or organization filing the complaint need not be a victim of the alleged discrimination but may complain on behalf of another person or group.

Timeliness

A complaint must be filed within 180 calendar days of the date of the alleged discrimination, unless the time for filing is extended by OCR for good cause shown under certain circumstances.

Institutional Grievance Procedures

Prior to filing a complaint with OCR against an institution, a potential complainant may want to find out about the institution's grievance process and use that process to have the complaint resolved. However, a complainant is not required by law to use the institutional grievance process before filing a complaint with OCR. If a complainant uses an institutional grievance process and also chooses to file the complaint with OCR, the complaint must be filed with OCR within 60 days after completion of the institutional grievance process.

How to File a Complaint

Complainants wishing to file a complaint may do so by:

Online: Complainants may file a complaint with OCR using OCR's electronic complaint form at the following website: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>.

E-mail: Complainants may file a complaint, using the following e-mail address: ocr@ed.gov. Use the same procedures as below.

For those without current e-mail accounts, Internet access may be freely available from your local public library, and free e-mail accounts are available from several large providers.

Mail or Facsimile: Complainants may mail or send by facsimile a letter or use the OCR's Discrimination Complaint Form available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>.

In your correspondence, please include:

- The complainant's name, address and, if possible (although not required), a telephone number where the complainant may be reached during business hours;
- Information about the person(s) or class of persons injured by the alleged discriminatory act(s) (names of the injured person(s) are not required);
- The name and location of the institution that committed the alleged discriminatory act(s); and
- A description of the alleged discriminatory act(s) in sufficient detail to enable OCR to understand what occurred, when it occurred, and the basis for the alleged discrimination (race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age or the *Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act*).

Where to Write:

The OCR office for Oregon is located at:

Seattle Office
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education
915 Second Avenue Room 3310
Seattle, WA 98174-1099

Telephone: 206-607-1600
FAX: 206-607-1601; TDD: 800-877-8339
Email: OCR.Seattle@ed.gov

The OCR National Headquarters is located at:

U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights
Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Bldg
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-1100

Telephone: 800-421-3481
FAX: 202-453-6012; TDD: 800-877-8339
Email: OCR@ed.gov