

UPDATE

Our privacy statement is changing. Changes will be in effect July 31, 2025.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Religious Freedom

Learn more here about your right to express your religion and belief and be protected from discrimination.



I'm facing religious discrimination at work

Your rights

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employers with 15 or more employees from discriminating on the basis of religion. State or local anti-discrimination laws may cover employers with fewer employees. If you work for local, state, or federal governments, additional legal protections may exist.
- If your employer is covered by an anti-discrimination law, you have the right to be free from religious harassment that creates a hostile work environment.

- If asked, your employer must provide a reasonable accommodation for your religious practices. An accommodation is not considered reasonable if it causes the employer an undue hardship (e.g., compromises safety or imposes significant costs).

What to do if your rights are violated

- You can file a complaint with the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#). You also may be able to file a complaint with a comparable state or local agency.
- You can contact the [ACLU in your state](#) for more information.

Additional resources

- [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission – Religious Discrimination](#)
- [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission – Religious Garb and Grooming in the Workplace](#)

In other languages

- [العَرَبِيَّة \(Arabic\)](#)
- [فارسی \(Farsi\)](#)
- [Español \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Français \(French\)](#)
- [اُردُو \(Urdu\)](#)
- [Soomaali \(Somali\)](#)
- [हिंदी \(Hindi\)](#)
- [\(Traditional Chinese\) 繁體中文](#)
- [\(Simplified Chinese\) 简体中文](#)

I'm facing religious discrimination in housing

Your rights

- The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits religious discrimination in the rental, sale, and financing of homes, with some exemptions (e.g., for small, owner-occupied buildings). It also prohibits the inclusion of discriminatory terms and conditions as part of a home sale or rental. State and local laws may provide additional protections.
- You can't be turned away from renting or buying a home because of your religion, or receive less favorable terms and conditions.
- You can't be charged more for renting or buying a home, or for a mortgage, because of your faith.
- Your neighbors cannot threaten, harass, or intimidate you because of your faith.

What to do if your rights are violated

- You can file a [fair housing complaint online](#) with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. You also may be able to file a complaint with a comparable state or local agency.
- You can contact the [ACLU in your state](#) for more information.

Additional resources

- [Department of Housing and Urban Development – Religion](#)
- [Department of Justice – Combating Religious Discrimination](#)

I'm facing religious discrimination at a public school

Your rights

- School officials may not incorporate prayer or other religious activities into class or school events, such as football games, assemblies, or awards ceremonies.
- School officials, including coaches and other staff, may not participate in prayer or other religious activities with students during school or at any other time they are acting in their official capacities as school employees.

- School officials may not facilitate, approve of, or otherwise encourage student prayer or other student religious activities.
- School officials may not impose their faith on students by preaching or teaching religious doctrine, such as creationism, as truth.
- School officials may not read scripture from religious texts to students or require students read these texts without a secular academic reason for doing so.
- School officials may not invite outside guests to preach or otherwise promote religious message to students during the school day or during school events.
- School officials may not display religious symbols and iconography in school unless they have a secular, academic reason for doing so and unless the display avoids signaling support for religion generally or any particular faith.
- School officials may not discriminate against you based on your religious beliefs.
- School officials cannot deny you the same opportunities and privileges provided to students of other faiths.
- School officials are required by law to maintain a school environment free of religious harassment by other students.
- You have the right to express your religious beliefs at school. For example, you may pray individually or in groups and discuss your religious views with your classmates during student activity times like recess or lunch, provided that you are not disruptive. You may express your religious beliefs in your schoolwork if they are relevant to the assignment. You may pass out religious literature to classmates, subject to the same rules that apply to other materials students distribute.
- School officials may be required to permit you to wear religious clothing or a religious head covering, such as a yarmulke or hijab, depending on the circumstances of your particular situation.
- School officials may be required to excuse your absences for religious holidays.

What to do if your rights are violated

- You can [file a complaint](#) with the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division or the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) using [OCR's electronic complaint form](#). You also may be able to file a complaint with a comparable state or local agencies, or your school district.
- You can contact the [ACLU in your state](#) for more information.

Additional Resources

- [ACLU – Religion and Public Schools](#)
- [ACLU – Prayer and Proselytizing in School](#)
- [ACLU – Creationism, Evolution, and Religion](#)
- [ACLU – Free Exercise in Public Schools](#)
- [Department of Education – Religious Discrimination](#)
- [Department of Justice – Combating Religious Discrimination in Education](#)

I’m facing religious discrimination by a business

Your rights

- Under Title II of the Civil Rights Act, certain places of business, such as most restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, sports arenas, stadiums, and other entertainment venues, are called “public accommodations.” Public accommodations cannot discriminate against customers based on their religion. You have the right to the full use and enjoyment of these places regardless of your faith. Some state and local laws may prohibit religious discrimination by other types of businesses, such as retail stores.
- Public accommodations cannot turn you away because of your hijab, yarmulke, turban, or other religious appearance or dress, or demand that you remove it in order to obtain goods or services.

What to do if your rights are violated

- You may file a complaint with the [U.S. Department of Justice’s Housing and Civil Enforcement Division](#). You also may be able to file a complaint with a comparable state or local agencies.
- You can contact the [ACLU in your state](#) for more information.

Additional Resources

- [ACLU – Using Religion to Discriminate](#)

- [Department of Justice – Title II of the Civil Rights Act](#)
- [National Conference of State Legislatures – State Public Accommodation Laws](#)

I'm concerned about religious discrimination at an airport or border crossing

Your rights

- Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers frequently stop, detain, and search individuals or their personal items, including laptops or cell phones, at the border—even if there is nothing suspicious about the person or their luggage. CBP has the authority to ask your immigration status when you are entering the United States or leaving the country.
- If you are a U.S. citizen and you have presented a valid passport, you do not have to answer officers' questions, although refusing to answer questions about the nature and purpose of your travel could result in further inspection and delay. If you are a lawful permanent resident, we recommend you answer officers' questions. If you are a non-citizen visa holder, you may be denied entry into the U.S. if you refuse to answer officers' questions. However, officers may not select you for questioning based on your religion, race, national origin, gender, ethnicity, or political beliefs.
- If you are a U.S. citizen and the officers' questions become intrusive, you have the right to ask for an attorney before answering any questions. If you are a lawful permanent resident, your right to talk to a lawyer depends on the circumstances. If you are a non-citizen visa holder, you may ask to speak with an attorney, but you generally do not have the right to consult one before answering officers' questions. If officers inform you that you are under arrest, or if it becomes clear that they suspect you have committed a crime, you have the right to talk to a lawyer before answering any questions, regardless of your immigration status.
- You have the right to be free from discriminatory questioning or removal by airline employees. Pilots may refuse to fly a passenger if they reasonably believe, based on observation, that the passenger is a safety threat. However, pilots may not question you or refuse to allow you on a flight because of a stereotype based on religion.
- You have the right to wear your religious head covering, such as a yarmulke or hijab, during an airport security screening, unless you trigger an alarm and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) staff request additional

screening. They may conduct a pat-down of your head covering or ask you to remove it. You have the right to request that the pat-down or removal be conducted by a person of your gender in a private area.

- If you do not want the TSA officer to touch your head covering, you may refuse and say that you would prefer to pat it down yourself. The TSA officer may supervise you as you pat down your own head covering, then rub your hands with a small cotton cloth and place it in a machine to test for chemical residue. If you pass this chemical residue test, you should be allowed to proceed.

What to do if you believe your rights might be violated

- You can contact the [ACLU in your state](#) for more information.

Additional Resources

- [Transport Security Administration \(TSA\) – Travelling with Religious and Cultural Items](#)
- [Transport Security Administration \(TSA\) – Head Coverings and Religious Items](#)

My house of worship is facing discrimination

- Federal law prohibits zoning boards from treating some religions better or worse than others when it comes to building, renovating, or operating houses of worship or using property for other religious purposes.
- Zoning officials can't treat religious institutions less favorably than comparable non-religious institutions (e.g., civic organizations) when it comes to land-use decisions.
- Federal law provides special protections that help houses of worship when local zoning laws would significantly impede their ability to build, renovate, or operate their facilities, or otherwise use their property for religious purposes. In these instances, local zoning boards must be able to show that applying a challenged zoning rule to a particular house of worship furthers an extremely important (in legal terms, "compelling") governmental interest (e.g., safety or environmental protection). Zoning boards also must show that there is no other reasonable way to go about protecting that interest. If the zoning board cannot show this, it must permit the house of worship to proceed with its plans.

What to do if you see discriminatory behavior

- You can report discrimination against your house of worship to the U.S. [Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division](#).
- You can contact the [ACLU in your state](#) for more information.

Additional Resources

- [Department of Justice – Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 \(RLUIPA\)](#)

I'm facing religious discrimination in prison

Your rights

- Federal law provides special protections for prisoners' religious exercise. If a prison policy, rule, or practice significantly impedes your ability to practice your sincerely held religious beliefs, prison officials must show that applying the rule to you furthers an extremely important (in legal terms, "compelling") governmental interest (e.g., prisoners' safety or health) and that there is no other reasonable way to go about protecting that interest. If prison officials cannot show this, they must provide a religious accommodation to enable you to practice your faith.
- Depending on your particular circumstances, prison officials may be required to provide you with a religious diet (e.g., halal or kosher meals), worship services, and access to clergy. They also may be required to allow you to have religious texts, wear certain religious clothing, headwear, and jewelry, and maintain religious grooming practices (e.g., wearing a beard or long hair).
- Prison officials cannot impose religious beliefs or practices on you. They cannot punish you for declining to take part in religious activities or events that include religious elements. Prison officials cannot give special preference to members of one faith, or treat prisoners of some religions less favorably than those of others.

What to do if your rights are violated

- You can file a complaint with the U.S. [Department of Justice's Special Litigation Division](#).

- You can contact the [ACLU in your state](#) for more information.

Additional resources

- [ACLU – Religious Freedom in Prison](#)
 - [Department of Justice – Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act \(RLUIPA\)](#)
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