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Discrimination in Public Accommodations: Government Enforcement

When and Where to File a Complaint -- Public Accommodations and Facilities

Federal law prohibits privately owned facilities that offer food, lodging, gasoline or entertainment to the public from discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin. If you think that you have been discriminated against in using such a facility, you may file a complaint with the [Civil Rights Division](#) of the Department of Justice, or with the United States attorney in your area. You may also file suit in the U.S. district court.

In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in a wide range of places of public accommodation, including facilities that offer lodging, food, entertainment, sales or rental services, health care and other professional services, or recreation.

There are also state laws that broadly prohibit discrimination on the bases of race, color, religion, national origin, and disability in places of public accommodation. To determine whether your state has such a law, you should contact your state or local human rights agency, or your state attorney general's office.

Public facilities such as courthouses, jails, hospitals, parks, and other facilities owned and operated by state and local government entities cannot discriminate in their services because of race, color, religion, national origin, or disability. If you think a public facility has discriminated against you because of race, color, religion, or national origin, you may file suit in the U.S. district court or file a complaint with the nearest [U.S. Attorney's Office](#).

People with disabilities cannot be discriminated against or excluded from services, programs, or activities offered by state or local governments. All public transportation systems must be accessible to people with disabilities, regardless of whether the system receives federal financial assistance.

State and local governments must eliminate any eligibility criteria for participation in programs, activities, and services that screen out or tend to screen out persons with disabilities, unless the government can establish that the requirements are necessary for the provision of the service, program, or activity. In addition, public facilities must ensure that individuals with disabilities are not excluded from services, programs, or activities because buildings are inaccessible.

State and local agencies that provide emergency telephone services must provide "direct access" to individuals who rely on telecommunication display devices (TTD's or TTY's) for the deaf, or computer modems for telephone communication. Companies offering telephone services to the general public must offer telephone relay services to individuals who use TTY's or similar devices.

Intrastate complaints should be filed with that state. Interstate complaints should be filed with the [Federal Communications Commission](#).

Discrimination complaints about public facilities (other than Architectural Barriers Act complaints, see below) should be sent to:

- the federal agency that provides funding to the facility subject to the complaint;
- the federal agency designated to investigate complaints; or
- the Department of Justice.

Complaints may always be filed with the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, which will refer your complaint to the appropriate agency.

Complaints regarding new construction of, or alterations to buildings or facilities funded by the federal government and subject to the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 should be sent to:

Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board

Office of Compliance and Enforcement

1331 F Street, NW, Suite 1000

Washington, DC 20004-1111

(202) 222-0800

(800) 872-2253

TTY: (202) 272-0082

TTY: (202) 993-2822

Fax: (202) 272-0081

The [Disability Rights Section](#) of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice handles complaints of discrimination based on disability in places of public accommodation, including all hotels, restaurants, retail stores, theaters, health care facilities, convention centers, parks, and places of recreation. To file a complaint of discrimination based on disability, call **(800) 514-0301** and send your complaint to:

U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

Disability Rights Section

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20530

(202) 307-2227

TTY: (800) 514-0383

Fax: (202) 307-1198

If the Disability Rights Section believes that there is a pattern or practice of discrimination, or the complaint raises an issue of general public importance, it may attempt to negotiate a settlement of the matter, or bring an action in U.S. district court. Any such action would be taken on behalf of the United States. You also have the option of filing your own lawsuit in U.S. district court.

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