

**KNOW
YOUR****RIGHTS**

Know Your Rights: How to File a Discrimination Complaint as an LGBTQIA+ Student

The Landscape of LGBTQIA+ Educational Discrimination

LGBTQIA+ students face unique barriers in accessing their education. In school, LGBTQIA+ youth are [bullied](#) significantly more than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers. Bullying and harassment can lead LGBTQIA+ youth to [miss school and have lower grade point averages](#) and are risk factors for increased rates of youth suicide. Recently, [state legislatures are increasingly targeting schools and LGBTQIA+ students](#) through bills that censor teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity or prohibit transgender and gender-expansive youth from using the restroom or joining the sports team that corresponds with their gender identity. When they attend university, LGBTQIA+ college students are four times more likely to attend a [university](#) away from home and are more likely to experience poor mental health, bullying, and harassment.

You do not need to be LGBTQIA+ to face discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. If you are treated differently on the basis of an employer's perception of your sexual orientation or gender identity, this could also qualify as prohibited discrimination. You can read more about LGBTQIA+ discrimination [here](#).

Federal Law

In 1972, Congress passed Title IX as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. Often referred to as "Title IX," this federal civil rights law prohibits sex discrimination, including sex-based harassment, against students (and other people, including employees, contractors, applicants, and guests) at a school that receives federal money.

Despite the federal government's [stated enforcement position](#) of weaponizing civil rights law to

attack transgender youth, Title IX still protects LGBTQIA+ students from harassment and other forms of harassment. However, the federal government has not fully fulfilled its obligation to enforce anti-discrimination law on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. As a result, state enforcement agencies offer another avenue for recourse to address discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Local: Students who experience discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity can also approach their university or school's Title IX office.

HOW CAN I FIND A LAWYER?

These materials have been prepared by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) for informational purposes only. The provision of this material does not create an attorney-client relationship between any attorney at NWLC and the reader and does not constitute legal advice. Organizations and individuals are encouraged to contact a lawyer licensed in their jurisdiction for advice on their specific circumstances. If you are facing sex-based discrimination as a student or employee, the [Legal Network for Gender Equity](#) can help connect you to attorneys. Attorneys in our Legal Network will have a first meeting or call with you for free.

To contact the Legal Network for Gender Equity, fill out an online intake form here: <https://nwlc.org/legal-assistance> or call us at: 202-319-3053. You can also check the National Employment Lawyers Association attorney database here: <http://exchange.nela.org/memberdirectory/findalawyer>. You may also find legal help through the American Bar Association Directory: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_services/flh-home/flh-bardirectories-and-lawyer-finders.

How to Submit a Complaint to your State Enforcement Agency

*Note: Only states with LGBTQIA+ anti-discrimination protections in education are included. If a state is not included, it means there is not a state-level remedy."

California

The California Department of Education investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000](#), the [California Education Code §§ 200-220](#), and [the](#)

[School Success and Opportunity Act of 2013](#). Complaints are handled by the Department's Education Equity Uniform Complaint Procedures (UCP) Office.

Submit a complaint in California by email to eeucpo@cde.ca.gov or by mail to the California Department of Education, Education Equity UCP Office, 1430 N Street, Suite 5319, Sacramento, CA 95814. Complaints must generally be filed within 180 days of the last discriminatory action and may require prior filing of a complaint with the local education agency (e.g., school district). If you have questions, consult CDE's website or call the CDE-EEUCP Office at 916-319-8239.

California Department of Education: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/>

Colorado

The Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies, Civil Rights Division, investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [House Bill 21-1108 \(2021\)](#) and [Regulatory Rule 3 CCR 708-1](#).

Submit a complaint in Colorado through [the electronic complaint form](#) at CaseConnect. Complaints must generally be filed within 60 days of the last discriminatory act. More information about legal protections is available on the Colorado Department of Education's website and more information about how to file a complaint is available at the Civil Rights Division's website. For additional information, reach out to the Civil Rights Division at dora_ccrd@state.co.us or 303-894-2997.

Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies, CRD: <https://ccrd.colorado.gov/>

Connecticut

The Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [Public Act 11-55 \(2011\)](#) and [Section 10-15c\(a\)](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Submit a complaint in Connecticut through [the electronic complaint](#) form at the CHRO website. Complaints must generally be filed within 300 days of the last discriminatory act. Complaints are initially handled by intake officers at one of the Commission's regional offices. For more information, consult CHRO's website.

Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities: <https://portal.ct.gov/chro>

Delaware

Both the Delaware Public Education Ombudsperson Program (DPEOP) and the Delaware Division of Human and Civil Rights investigate complaints of discrimination under state law. DPEOP investigates complaints of discrimination in schools on the basis of sexual orientation under [Title 14, Section 225](#)

of the Delaware Administrative Code. The Delaware Human and Civil Rights Commission investigates complaints based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations under [Title 6, Section 4502](#) of the Delaware Code.

Submit a complaint in Delaware through [electronic complaint forms](#). To request a parent/family consultation with DPEOP, use the referral form on the DPEOP website. For additional support, you can call DPEOP at 302-327-1088 or visit their website. To file a public accommodations complaint with the Commission, use the intake form on their website. Complaints filed with the Commission must generally be submitted within 180 days of the last discriminatory act.

Delaware Division of Human and Civil Rights: <https://humanandcivilrights.delaware.gov/>

District of Columbia

The District of Columbia investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under [District Code § 2-1402.41](#). Both the DC Public Schools Comprehensive Alternative Resolution & Equity Team (CARE) and the DC Office of Human Rights (OHR) investigate complaints of discrimination.

Submit a complaint in the District of Columbia through [electronic complaint forms](#). Complaints can be filed with the DC Public Schools CARE team through an online grievance form, with more information available on the DCPS website. Complaints can be filed with the DC Office of Human Rights through an online educational institutions questionnaire form, with more information available on OHR's website. Complaints filed with OHR must be filed within one year of the last discriminatory act.

DC Office of Human Rights: <https://ohr.dc.gov/>

Hawai'i

The Hawai'i Department of Education's Civil Rights Compliance Branch (CRCB) investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [HB1489 \(2018\)](#). Student protections are outlined in [State Board of Education Policy 305-10](#) and school staff protections are outlined in [State Board of Education Policy 900-1](#).

Submit a complaint in Hawai'i by emailing a complaint intake form to crcb@k12.hi.us. Intake forms for both student and school staff complaints are available on CRCB's website. For assistance or more information, call 808-784-6325 or reach out to the appropriate regional equity specialist identified on CRCB's website.

Hawai'i Department of Education, Civil Rights Compliance Branch: <https://hawaiipublicschools.org/useful-links/policies/nondiscrimination-policy/>

Illinois

The Illinois Department of Human Rights investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [Public Act 093-1078 \(2006\)](#).

Submit a complaint in Illinois through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Department of Human Rights by completing the complainant information sheet, saving the form, and submitting via email to IDHR.Intake@illinois.gov. More information can be found on IDHR's website.

Illinois Department of Human Rights: <https://dhr.illinois.gov/>

Iowa

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation under state law. These rights are protected through [Iowa Code § 216.9](#).

Submit a complaint in Iowa through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Civil Rights Commission through a DocuSign intake form. Alternatively, you can fill out the paper complaint form and mail it to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, 6200 Park Avenue, Suite 100, Des Moines, IA 50321-1270. Complaints must generally be filed within 300 days of the last discriminatory action. For more information, visit the Commission's website or call the Commission at 515-281-4121.

Iowa Office of Civil Rights: <https://icrc.iowa.gov/>

Maine

The Maine Human Rights Commission investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [5 M.R.S. § 4552](#).

Submit a complaint in Maine through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Maine Human Rights Commission through an electronic intake questionnaire. The full form is accessible on the Commission's website. Complaints must generally be filed within 300 days of the last discriminatory act.

Maine Human Rights Commission: <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/>

Maryland

The Maryland State Department of Education investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [HB 850/SB 666 \(2022\)](#).

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Submit a complaint in Maryland by emailing the State Department of Education. Complaints can be filed with the Department's Ombudsman, currently at teresa.dantzler1@maryland.gov. There is no specific complaint form. Complaints must generally be filed within 60 days of the last discriminatory action. For more information, visit the Department's website or call the Ombudsman's office at 410-767-0480.

Maryland State Department of Education, Office of the Ombudsman: <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/pages/ombudsman/index.aspx>

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [Mass. Gen. Laws, chapter 76, § 5](#).

Submit a complaint in Massachusetts through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Attorney General's Office's Consumer Complaint intake form; be sure to select a "Discrimination or Civil Rights Violation" when filling out the form. For more information, visit the Attorney General Office's website or call the Civil Rights Division at 617-963-2917.

Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General, Civil Rights Division: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/learn-about-the-attorney-generals-civil-rights-division>

Michigan

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [SB4 \(2023\)](#).

Submit a complaint in Michigan through an [electronic form](#) or by emailing MDCRservicecenter@michigan.gov. Complaints can be filed through the online service request form. Complaints must generally be filed within 180 days of the last discriminatory action. For more information, call 1-800-482-3604 or visit the Department's website.

Michigan Department of Civil Rights: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdcr>

Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [Minn. Stat. § 363A.13](#).

Submit a complaint in Minnesota through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Department of Human Rights through the online consultation inquiry form and must generally be filed within one year of the last discriminatory action. For more information, call 1-833-454-0148 or visit the

Department's website.

Minnesota Department of Human Rights: <https://mn.gov/mdhr/>

Nevada

The Nevada Equal Rights Commission investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [NRS 651.050.3\(k\)](#).

Submit a complaint in Nevada through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Nevada Equal Rights Commission through their online intake form as a public accommodations complaint and must generally be filed within 300 days of the last discriminatory action. For more information, visit the Commission's website.

Nevada Equal Rights Commission: <https://detr.nv.gov/NERC>

New Hampshire

The New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [SB263 \(2019\)](#).

Submit a complaint in New Hampshire by email or calling 603-271-2767 to speak with an intake investigator. A [full complaint form](#) is available on the Commission's website, which can be completed and submitted through email to humanrights@hrc.nh.gov. Complaints must generally be filed within 180 days of the last discriminatory action.

New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights: <https://www.humanrights.nh.gov/>

New Jersey

The New Jersey Division on Civil Rights investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD), [N.J.S.A. 10:5-12\(11\)\(f\)](#).

Submit a complaint in New Jersey through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Division on Civil Rights through the New Jersey Bias Investigation Access System or by calling 862-350-5150. Complaints must generally be filed within 180 days of the last discriminatory act. For more information, call 1-833-653-2748 or visit the Division's website.

New Jersey Division on Civil Rights: <https://www.njoag.gov/about/divisions-and-offices/division-on-civil-rights-home/>

New Mexico

The New Mexico Human Rights Bureau investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [HB207 \(2023\)](#).

Submit a complaint in New Mexico through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Human Rights Bureau through their online inquiry form as a public accommodations complaint. Complaints must generally be filed within 300 days of the last discriminatory act. For more information, visit the Bureau's website.

New Mexico Human Rights Bureau: <https://www.dws.state.nm.us/Human-Rights-Information>

New York

The New York State Division of Human Rights investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [AB3661 \(2010\)](#).

Submit a complaint in New York through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Division of Human Rights through their online complaint form or by filling out the full complaint form and mailing to a regional office listed on the document. Complaints must generally be filed within three years of the last discriminatory action. For more information, visit the Division's website.

New York State Division of Human Rights: <https://dhr.ny.gov/>

North Dakota

The North Dakota Department of Labor and Human Rights investigates complaints of discrimination in public services (including schools) based on sex. In 2020, the Department [applied federal judicial interpretations](#) of non-discrimination to North Dakota state law. As a result, the Department will investigate complaints related to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Submit a complaint in North Dakota through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can be filed with the Department of Labor and Human Rights through their online complaint form as a public services complaint. Complaints must generally be filed within 180 days of the last discriminatory action. For more information, visit the Department's website.

North Dakota Department of Labor and Human Rights: <https://www.nd.gov/labor/>

Oregon

The Oregon Department of Education investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [ORS § 659.850](#).

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Submit a complaint in Oregon through an [electronic complaint form](#). Complaints can only be filed if a formal complaint has already been filed with the individual school or school district. The online intake form for complaints and appeals can be found on the Department's website.

Oregon Department of Education: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/pages/default.aspx>

Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission investigates complaints of discrimination under the [Pennsylvania Human Relations Act](#) and the [Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities Act](#). In 2018, the Department issued [guidance](#) on sex-based discrimination clarifying that the Commission will investigate complaints related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Submit a complaint in Pennsylvania by emailing the Commission. After filling out the full complaint form, it can be sent to the Commission by email at phrc@pa.gov. Complaints must generally be filed within 180 days of the last discriminator action. For more information, visit the Commission's website.

The Pennsylvania Attorney General is also leading investigations into discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in education. You can submit a civil rights complaint here: <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/submit-a-complaint/civil-rights-complaint-2/>

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/phrc>

Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Department of Education investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These rights are protected through state regulations at [200-RICR-30-10-1 \(2018\)](#).

Submit a complaint in Rhode Island by emailing the Department. Complaints can only be filed if a formal complaint has already been filed with the individual school or school district. When an appeal is appropriate, fill out this complaint form and send it to the Department at legal@ride.ri.gov. For more information, consult this resource or visit the Department's website.

Rhode Island Department of Education: <https://ride.ri.gov/>

Utah

The Utah State Board of Education's Internal Audit Department evaluates school compliance with regulatory requirements, including prohibitions on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state policy. They accept claims of discrimination to investigate. These rights are protected through Utah [Administrative Code Rule R277-217 \(2020\)](#).

Submit a complaint in Utah through an [electronic complaint form](#) or email. Complaints can only be

filed if a formal complaint has already been filed with the individual school or school district. If the local complaint cannot be resolved, complainants can contact the Internal Audit Department's Utah Public Education Hotline through their online complaint form or by emailing audit@schools.utah.gov. For more information, call 801-538-7813 or visit their website.

Utah State Board of Education: <https://www.schools.utah.gov/>

Utah State Board of Education Internal Audit Department: <https://schools.utah.gov/internalaudit/index>

Vermont

The Vermont Human Rights Commission investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [9 VSA § 4502](#).

Submit a complaint in Vermont by emailing the Commission. After filling out the questionnaire for school complaints, it can be sent to human.rights@vermont.gov or mailed to 14-16 Baldwin Street, Montpelier, VT 05633. For more information, call the Commission at 802-828-2480 or visit the Commission's website.

Vermont Human Rights Commission: <https://hrc.vermont.gov/>

Virginia

The Virginia Office of Civil Rights investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [SB 868 \(2020\)](#).

Submit a complaint in Virginia through an [electronic complaint form](#) or by email. Complaints can be submitted through the Office of Civil Rights online complaint form or by filling out the full complaint form and emailing it to CivilRights@oag.state.va.us. For more information, visit the Office of Civil Rights website.

Virginia Office of Civil Rights: <https://www.oag.state.va.us/citizen-resources/civil-rights>

Washington

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity under state law. These rights are protected through [RCW 49.60.040](#), [RCW 28A.642.010](#), and [RCW 28A.642.080](#).

Submit a complaint in Washington by email. Complaints can only be filed after a local complaint has been reviewed by the school district. Within 20 days of receiving the district's decision, complaints can be filed with OSPI by emailing equity@k12.wa.us. For more information, including contact information for district civil rights coordinators, visit OSPI's website.

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/>

Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction investigates complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation under state law. These rights are protected through [Wis. Stat. § 118.13 \(2001\)](#). For complaints related to gender identity, consult a legal helpline. Since 2017, federal courts in Wisconsin have recognized legal protections on the basis of gender identity.

Submit a complaint in Wisconsin by mailing a complaint to the Department. Complaints can only be filed after a local complaint has been reviewed by the school district. When an appeal is appropriate, mail your complaint to the Department of Public Instruction, Pupil Nondiscrimination Program, PO Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707. For more information, review this resource or visit the Department's website.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: <https://dpi.wi.gov/>