

Your Rights under the Minnesota Human Rights Act

The Minnesota Human Rights Act protects everyone in Minnesota from illegal discrimination

What is illegal discrimination?

Discrimination is when someone treats you differently or does not give you rights you would normally have because of your race, your age, your sex, or some other protected characteristic. Under the Minnesota Human Rights Act it is illegal to treat you differently because you belong to a certain group or “protected class” of people.

Protected classes covered by the Minnesota Human Rights Act

- Race
- Color
- Creed
- Religion
- National origin
- Sex
- Marital status
- Familial status
- Disability
- Public assistance
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Local human rights commission activity

Protected Areas covered by the Minnesota Human Rights Act

Places where discrimination is not allowed are called “protected areas.” Under the Minnesota Human Rights Act, discrimination is illegal in the following protected areas:

- Business
- Credit
- Education
- Employment
- Housing
- Public Accommodations
- Public Services

There are some exceptions to the Minnesota Human Rights Act coverage. Unfortunately, unfair treatment happens a lot, but not every unfair act is illegal.

Summary of Protections

The table below shows the classes which are protected in each area.

| | Employment | Housing | Public Accommodation | Public Service | Education | Credit | Business |
|--|------------|---------|----------------------|----------------|-----------|--------|----------|
| Race | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Color | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Creed | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no |
| Religion | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no |
| National Origin | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Sex | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Marital Status | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | no |
| Disability | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Public Assistance | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | no |
| Age | yes | no | no | no | yes | no | no |
| Sexual Orientation | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Familial Status | yes | yes | no | no | no | no | no |
| Local Human Rights Commission Activity | yes | no | no | no | no | no | no |

Other protections in the Minnesota Human Rights Act

Reprisal (revenge) is illegal under the Minnesota Human Rights Act. You cannot be punished for:

- Opposing discrimination
- Having friends from other protected classes
- Filing a discrimination charge or complaining about harassment or discrimination
- Taking part in an investigation by a human rights organization

It is also illegal to aid and abet discrimination. This means a person cannot help someone else commit discriminatory acts.

Obstructing the work of the Department of Human Rights is illegal as well. For example, it is illegal for a person to suggest to others that they lie or withhold information relevant to a discrimination investigation, or that they refrain from testifying in a discrimination investigation.

Definitions

Protected Classes

There are 13 protected classes covered in the Minnesota Human Rights Act. These classes represent specific characteristics, like race, religion, sex or disability.

Race: such as Caucasian, African American, Asian or American Indian. Some people see themselves as belonging to more than one race.

Color: skin color.

Creed: a belief system. A creed is very important to the person who believes it. A creed is like a religion, but it does not have to involve a God or Gods.

Religion: a set of beliefs, values, and practices based on the teachings of a spiritual leader. Religion involves a God or Gods.

National Origin: what part of the world you come from, or where your ancestors lived.

Sex (gender): whether a person is male or female.

Marital Status: whether you are single, married or divorced.

Disability: a person has a disability if:

- He or she has a physical, sensory—blindness or deafness, for example—or mental impairment; and
- This impairment “materially interferes” with—it largely gets in the way of—a major life activity; or
- He or she has a record of this kind of impairment; or
- He or she is recognized as having this kind of impairment.

Not every injury or illness amounts to “disability” under the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

Public Assistance: these are government programs that help people with low incomes or special needs. Some examples of public assistance are:

- Medicaid or Medical Assistance
- Food Support (food stamps)
- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Housing Assistance or Section 8 Assistance

- Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP)
- National School Lunch Program's free lunch program

Age: how old you are. This class is protected only in two areas, employment and education. If a minor—child under 18 years old—wants to file a discrimination charge, they must have a parent or legal guardian do it for them.

Sexual Orientation: whether someone is—or is thought to be—gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual or transgender.

Familial Status: someone who has children under 18 years old living with them. Generally, a landlord cannot refuse to rent to parents with children. This class is only protected in housing.

Local Human Rights Commission Activity: you cannot be discriminated against because you serve with a local human rights commission. This class is only protected in employment.

Protected Areas

Under the Minnesota Human Rights Act, discrimination is illegal in business, credit, education, employment, housing, public accommodations and public services. These are called “protected areas.”

Employment: where you work, or a job you are applying for.

Housing: renting an apartment, or buying a house. Housing is also called “real property.”

Public Accommodations: any place generally open to the public, like:

- Grocery stores
- Restaurants
- Movie theaters
- Day care

Public Service: a place or a service run by the government. Some examples are:

- State parks
- City buses
- Libraries
- Police and fire departments
- City, county, and state departments of health

Education: any public or private school, or college, university or trade school.

Credit: an organization that gives loans, like a bank or a credit union.

Business: if you own a business, other businesses cannot discriminate against you.

What to do

If you think you are a victim of discrimination:

- Write down what happened to you if you think it was unfair.
- Write down the dates when the unfair treatment happened.
- Write down the names of other people that were there.
- Write down what the people who were there said.

Do not wait!

Sometimes it is hard to say what is discrimination and what is not discrimination—every situation is different. But if you think you are a victim of discrimination, do not wait. Contact the Minnesota Department of Human Rights immediately. You have one year after the discrimination happened to file a complaint.

How to Contact Us

We take phone calls Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

Phone: 651-539-1100 (TTY 651-296-1283); Toll free: 1-800-657-3704

You do not need an appointment to visit our office

We accept walk-ins from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

Our address

Minnesota Department of Human Rights
Freeman Building
625 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Email address

info.MDHR@state.mn.us

If you are emailing the department about filing a charge of discrimination and do not receive a reply within five business days, please contact us by phone at 651-539-1100 (TTY 651-296-1283) or Toll Free at 800-657-3704.

Getting an interpreter

Interpreters may be available to communicate with our office. Call us and say, “I need a (say your language here) interpreter.”

This document is not a complete answer to your rights under the Minnesota Human Rights Act.