

FACT SHEET: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS UNDER TITLE VI

Protection from Discrimination Based on Actual or Perceived Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations, 7 C.F.R. Part 15 (Title VI). Title VI protects individuals from being discriminated against based on race, color, or national origin by entities receiving federal financial assistance from USDA (e.g., state and local agencies, educational institutions, non-profits, and other non-federal entities).

This fact sheet describes the ways Title VI protections cover individuals who are or are perceived to be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or of another religious group.

Title VI's protections from discrimination:

1. Title VI's protection from race, color, or national origin discrimination extends to individuals who experience discrimination, including harassment, based on their actual or perceived: (i) shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or (ii) citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity.
2. Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin against individuals of any religion, such as Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, or Buddhist, when the discrimination, for example, involves:
 - racial, ethnic, or ancestral slurs or stereotypes;
 - how they look, including skin color, physical features, or style of dress reflecting both ethnic and religious traditions; and
 - a foreign accent, a foreign name, including names commonly associated with particular shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, or speaking a foreign language.
3. Because Title VI does not protect individuals from discrimination based only on religion, USDA refers those complaints to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), which has jurisdiction on this issue. In certain programs, USDA may process administrative complaints of discrimination based exclusively on religion if the laws that authorize those programs cover religious discrimination.

Examples of the kinds of incidents that could, depending upon facts and circumstances, raise Title VI concerns include:

- A Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) participant who is Jewish and who is wearing a kippah (head covering) enters a food pantry site to request a food box. The participant reports that a CSFP volunteer makes a joke about the Holocaust and denies him the food box. The State agency operating the CSFP takes no steps to address this report.
- An Afghan rural homeowner reports concerns of being denied upgraded high-speed broadband service. All his neighbors received upgraded service. The service provider received federal financial assistance from USDA through Rural Development. The service provider calls the homeowner a “terrorist” and takes no steps to address the homeowner’s report.
- A Sikh man who wears a turban (head covering) reports that he overheard a ski lodge employee mocking his accent. The employee would not allow the Sikh man to purchase lift tickets to ski for his family. The employee stated that he didn’t think they would like it because where they come from no one skis. The resort received federal financial assistance from the Forest Service. The ski resort is alleged to have not taken effective action to address these reports.

What can a person do if they experience discrimination based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics?

Any individual who believes they have been discriminated against based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics may file a complaint of discrimination with OASCR. To file a complaint, visit www.usda.gov/oascr/filing-program-discrimination-complaint-usda-customer.

Additional Resources

If you have any questions or would like technical assistance, please contact the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights by visiting www.usda.gov/oascr/home.

You may contact the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Information Research Service, at [\(866\) 632-9992](tel:8666329992) (toll free) or send an email to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at CR-INFO@usda.gov. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities, may contact us through the Telecommunication Relay Service at [711](tel:711) or [\(800\) 845-6136](tel:8008456136) (Spanish).

Please note this resource does not have the force and effect of law. USDA’s enforcement of Title VI stems from Title VI and its implementing regulations. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.