

WHAT IS PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS?



You have the right to enter businesses or social service agencies, and to receive their goods and services, with dignity and without discrimination. Federal, state and local public accommodations laws say that no one can deny access or service to you or treat you differently in places of business because of your “protected class” – race, color, gender, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, parental status, marital status, disability or sexual orientation (includes gender identity).

Who Enforces Public Accommodations Laws?

The U.S. Department of Justice enforces Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Local civil rights agencies enforce local public accommodations laws. We want everyone to know about these protections and what to do if discrimination happens.



What Must Business Owners and Their Staff Do?



Access to Services: Everyone is entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, and advantages of any place of public accommodation. These laws make sure they don't take your protected class into account. For example, a store clerk cannot refuse to wait on you because you are gay or because you have a disability.



Similar treatment: Public accommodations laws require businesses to treat customers fairly. Business staff must use the same rules for everyone. For example, a clerk cannot follow a Hispanic customer around a store, just because of his race.



Segregation: Businesses are not allowed to segregate customers because of their protected class. For example, a dance studio cannot make customers who don't speak English take a different class from others.



No harassment: These laws do not allow harassment. If someone treats a customer negatively because of protected class, management must do something about it. For example, a business owner must stop an employee from calling a client racial names. Or a manager should stop a clerk who whistles at female customers.



Disability Access: People with disabilities may need "accommodations" so they can enjoy the same services as others. Business staff must provide reasonable accommodations. So, a grocery clerk should assist a blind customer who cannot read labels. A wheelchair user might need a ramp to the dentist's office front door.

What To Do If Discrimination Happens

Civil rights offices investigate discrimination complaints for free. If a business or social service agency did something that you think might be discrimination, you can contact a civil rights agency about filing a complaint. If they investigate and the evidence shows discrimination, the business owner has to change the situation and in most cases, pay back the customer for the damage done by the discrimination.

Fair business practices are not only the right thing to do – it's also good business.

Businesses are not expected to provide special treatment for anyone, just equal treatment.

Know your rights! If discrimination happened, do something about it!

