



Parent Guide: Filing a Complaint with HHS-OCR *Restoring Your Child's Access to Education and Healthcare*

On September 4, 2025, the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) issued a reminder that federally funded vaccine programs, such as Vaccines for Children, must uphold religious and conscience protections, even in states like CA, CT, ME, and NY where exemptions have been repealed. Federal protections and state human rights laws, including California's Unruh Civil Rights Act, Connecticut's CFEPA, Maine's Maine Human Rights Act, and New York's NY Human Rights Law, prohibit religious discrimination in education and healthcare. Following a September 10, 2025, meeting with OCR leadership, Guiding the Impact was encouraged to advise parents to file complaints with OCR if their child is denied school enrollment or medical care due to religious beliefs, enabling OCR to investigate and assert jurisdiction.

1. When to File

File with HHS-OCR if your child is:

- Denied enrollment or excluded from school because of your religious beliefs; or
- Denied medical care by a healthcare provider because of your religious or conscience beliefs.

Families should file complaints in these cases (especially in NY, CA, CT and ME) so OCR can investigate and determine jurisdiction.

2. How to File

- Go to: hhs.gov/civil-rights/filing-a-complaint
- Click: "File a Complaint Online" to file online or "Complaint Process" for instructions to file in writing.

3. How to Answer the OCR Complaint Form Questions

(Customize with your child's name, school/provider, dates, and details. Use plain, factual language.)

Q: Are you filing this complaint for someone else?

Yes.

Details: I am filing on behalf of my minor child, [CHILD'S FULL NAME]. I am the child's parent/legal guardian.

Q: I believe that I have been (or someone else has been) discriminated against based on:

Check "Religion".

Optional: Some families may also check "Conscience," since OCR's Sept. 4, 2025 letter references both religious and conscience protections.

Q: Whom do you believe discriminated against you (or someone else)?

List both the direct actor (school or provider) and the state agency.

- If School Denial: “[SCHOOL NAME], [School District Name], and [State Department of Education] (e.g., New York State Education Department).”
- If Healthcare Denial: “[CLINIC/PROVIDER NAME] and [State Department of Health] (e.g., Maine Department of Health and Human Services).”

Q: When do you believe that the discrimination or violation of conscience occurred?

OCR requires complaints within 180 days. Use a current/recent denial date, not just the first exclusion years ago.

- School Example: “September 3, 2025 – the first day of the current school year, when my child was again denied enrollment because of our religious beliefs. This denial is ongoing, as my child continues to be excluded daily.”
- Healthcare Example: “August 15, 2025 – the most recent appointment (or date I called to request to become a new patient) when my child was denied care because of our religious beliefs. This denial is ongoing, as the provider continues to refuse services.”

Q: Describe the acts of discrimination or violations of conscience.

- School Example: On [DATE], my child [NAME], age [XX], was denied enrollment/attendance at [SCHOOL NAME] because we declined vaccination due to our sincerely held religious beliefs. School officials informed us that without vaccination, my child could not attend. This resulted in my child being excluded from education.
- Healthcare Example: On [DATE], my child [NAME], age [XX], was denied medical care at [CLINIC/PROVIDER NAME] because we declined vaccination due to our sincerely held religious beliefs. The provider stated that without vaccination, my child could not be seen or treated. This resulted in my child being excluded from healthcare.

Q: Provide the reasons that the actions, or the denial of services, described above were discriminatory or were violations of conscience.

- Denying my child education/healthcare based on sincerely held religious beliefs constitutes discrimination on the basis of religion, a protected right under federal law (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment).
- HHS-OCR confirmed in its Sept. 4, 2025 letter that federally funded providers must respect religious and conscience protections. In addition, state human rights laws in California (Unruh Civil Rights Act), Connecticut (CFEPA), Maine (Maine Human Rights Act), and

New York (NY Human Rights Law) prohibit religious discrimination in education and healthcare. Excluding my child because of our beliefs violates these protections.

Q: Have you attempted to resolve this matter with the agency or organization against which you are filing?

- If Yes: Yes, I contacted [SCHOOL/PROVIDER] on [DATE] to request access for my child consistent with our religious beliefs, but they refused.
- If No: No, I did not attempt further resolution because the school/provider made it clear my child would not be allowed access without vaccination.

Q: Do you have any witnesses?

- If Yes: [NAME, TITLE] — e.g., “Principal [NAME] who informed me my child could not attend without vaccination.”
- If No: No outside witnesses, but the denial was communicated directly by [official’s name/title].

Q: What resolution are you seeking?

- School Example: Immediate restoration of my child’s access to education without penalty or discrimination, consistent with our religious beliefs.
- Healthcare Example: Immediate restoration of my child’s access to healthcare without penalty or discrimination, consistent with our religious beliefs.
- Optional: I also request that OCR ensure corrective action so future families are not excluded from federally funded education or healthcare programs because of religion.

4. Optional: State Human Rights Agencies

OCR is the key filing. Families may also file with their state agency (to build a record), since these laws ban religious discrimination:

California — Unruh Civil Rights Act; agency: Civil Rights Department (CRD):
<https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/complaintprocess/>

Connecticut — CFEPA; agency: CHRO: <https://portal.ct.gov/chro/complaint-process/complaint-process/how-to-file-a-discrimination-complaint>

Maine — Maine Human Rights Act; agency: MHRC: <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/file>

New York — NY Human Rights Law; agency: NYDHR: <https://dhr.ny.gov/complaint>