

## Massachusetts Muslims, Know Your Rights! Bullying at School

As described in [Standing Up & Speaking Out](#), CAIR-MA's report on the bullying of Muslim youth, more than 60% of the Massachusetts students who took part in our survey described being mocked, verbally harassed, or even physically abused because of their faith. For example:

- *Students pull off a Muslim girl's hijab in the lunchroom.*
- *Classmates often follow a Muslim boy to the school bus, shouting, "Allah Akbar!"*
- *A teacher makes fun of a Muslim student for fasting during Ramadan.*

If your child is being bullied (or you are a young person who is being bullied), please know that you are not alone – and that there are steps you can take for protection. **Please call CAIR-MA at (617) 862-9159** or send us a request for help on our [website](#).

**What must schools do?** In Massachusetts, all schools with students from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade must have a bullying prevention and intervention plan. It must be posted on the school's website. Each school gets to decide on the details but, very generally, the plan must:

- Apply to both staff and students,
- Explain how to make a complaint and what steps the school will take,
- List the kinds of discipline that are possible, and
- Describe how the school can protect the student being bullied.

**What should you do?** Report the problem to the school and ask for a meeting with school officials. (DO NOT contact the aggressor or their parents!) While the school gets to decide what actions to take, it's important for them to hear your views about how to keep your child safe. You can also suggest how the aggressor should be punished, although privacy laws may prevent the school from telling you what they decide to do. **Call CAIR-MA at (617) 862-9159** if the school doesn't take the bullying seriously.

**When is bullying a crime?** Many types of bullying don't rise to the level of a crime, but certain acts are indeed crimes and the aggressor could be arrested. Here are common examples:

- *Threat to commit a crime* – spoken or written, including social media posts;
- *Vandalism* – damage to your child's belongings or school property;
- *Assault* – aggressor puts your child in fear of physical harm, but there is no actual physical contact;
- *Assault and battery* – physical contact with your child without their consent, without using any object;
- *Assault and battery with a dangerous weapon* – using an object to hit your child, such as a backpack or sports equipment;
- *Hate crimes* – aggressor commits a crime because of your child's religion, race, national origin, or certain other reasons. For more information, see our brochure, [Know Your Rights: Hate Crimes & Harassment](#).

**When to involve the police.** In Massachusetts, schools must call the police if it looks like the aggressor may have committed a crime. But parents can also call the police on their own. Sometimes Muslim parents aren't sure if they should get the police involved, for various reasons. If you find yourself in this situation, **call CAIR-MA at (617) 862-9159** and we can discuss your concerns and your options.

**Harassment Prevention Orders.** In Massachusetts, parents can ask their local District Court for a Harassment Prevention Order, which tells an aggressor to leave your child alone. It doesn't cost anything to apply and you can file your request in person or online. To qualify for such an order, you must show two things:

- Three separate acts of bullying against your child;
- Each act of bullying was done on purpose, was aimed at your child, and was done to cause your child "fear, intimidation, abuse, or damage to property."

If there is more than one student who is bullying your child, you will need to file a separate case against each of them.

*Please call CAIR-MA before asking for a Harassment Prevention Order. We may be able to represent you. And even if we can't, we may be able to help you write up your application so you present a strong case.*

**Filing an education discrimination complaint.** If a school does not take proper action in response to repeated complaints of bullying based on your child's religion, race, or national origin, parents can file a discrimination complaint against the school with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). This is free and can be done online. Please note: an OCR complaint must be filed within 180 days of the last bullying incident.

*Please call CAIR-MA before filing an OCR complaint. We may be able to represent you. And even if we can't, we may be able to help you write up your complaint so you present a strong case.*

**For more information** on each of these topics, to hear what Muslim students had to say about the bullying they experienced, and to learn about other actions that parents, students, and schools can take, please see our 2021 publication, [Bullying Report of Massachusetts Muslim Youth: Standing Up & Speaking Out](#).

*[Last updated March 2022]*