

Massachusetts Muslims, Know Your Rights! Travel abuse complaints¹

- *You must check in for your flight in-person; you can't do so at a kiosk.*
- *The airline marks your boarding pass "SSSS."*
- *Airport security staff search you repeatedly, or in a very invasive way, before you can board your flight.*
- *When returning to the U.S., Customs agents question you for hours, asking about your travels and your personal life.*
- *Customs agents go through your phone and laptop, or even take them from you.*

Muslim travelers who have been treated poorly by U.S. agencies – typically the Transportation and Security Administration (TSA) or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) – can file complaints about their experience. The two complaints described below are similar and both are filed with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). CAIR-MA may recommend that you file both complaints. We can file them for you, for free.

Travel Redress Inquiry Program (“TRIP”) complaint. According to DHS, a TRIP complaint is for travelers who are repeatedly forced to go through extra (“secondary”) screening at the airport or border. The purpose of your complaint is to tell the government that it may be mistaking you for someone else who is on a terrorism watch list. Here is what happens if you file a TRIP complaint:

- You will need to give CAIR-MA information about who you are and what happened, send us a copy of your passport, and sign several papers. We will write up the complaint and then file it for you.
- DHS will assign you a “travel redress number” to show that it is investigating your complaint. You can give this number to an airline, Customs, or TSA if you have any further problems, to show that you have filed a complaint with DHS.
- DHS will send a letter saying that it has investigated your complaint and made any needed changes. Unfortunately, the letter will not say if you are listed on a terrorism watch list and will not say what DHS did or did not do. The next time you travel, you will find out if you are treated better.

¹ This information only concerns abusive or discriminatory treatment by government employees or agencies. Different laws apply to airlines and trains. Contact CAIR-MA for more information.

Civil Rights complaint. According to DHS, a civil rights complaint is for travelers who believe they were treated poorly due to race, religion, or national origin. *NOTE: A Civil Rights complaint will not help with watch list problems.* Instead, it more useful when you want to complain about a specific incident and ask the agencies involved to change their policies or to discipline their employees. Here is what happens if you file a Civil Rights complaint:

- You will need to give CAIR-MA information about who you are and what happened, and sign several papers. We will write up the complaint and then file it for you.
- DHS will send a letter explaining how they investigated your complaint, if they think that government employees did anything wrong, and perhaps offer tips to avoid problems when you travel.

When complaints don't work: filing a lawsuit.

- TRIP complaints: If you still have the same problems after DHS says it has investigated, then you may be on a terrorism watch list. CAIR offices have filed several lawsuits asking the courts to declare the watch lists unconstitutional because there are no clear guidelines for how someone gets put on these secret lists, you can't find out why you were put on a list or how to get taken of it, and Muslims are often targeted for no reason other than their religion. Your CAIR-MA attorney can give you more information about what is needed to file a lawsuit in court.
- Civil Rights complaints: If you are not satisfied with the DHS response, you may be able to file a lawsuit against the government employees – depending on the facts of your case. Your CAIR-MA attorney can give you more information about what is needed to file a lawsuit in court.

[Last updated March 2022]