

Massachusetts Muslims, Know Your Rights! Complaints about government travel abuses¹

- *You must check in for your flight in-person; you can't do so at a kiosk.*
- *The airline marks your boarding pass "SSSS."*
- *When going through security, TSA staff search you at length or in a very invasive way.*
- *When returning to the U.S., Customs agents question you for hours, asking about your travels, your friends and associates, 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). You may wish to file both. For more general information on travel, especially when returning to the U.S., click [here](#).

Please call CAIR-MA before filing a complaint. We may be able to represent you. And even if we can't, we may be able to help you choose which complaint(s) to file and give you tips on how to write your complaint.

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.”²

1. On the TRIP [home page](#), you are only given the option of filing online, which requires you to first answer a somewhat confusing quiz and then create an account before filling out the complaint form. However, you can instead fill out an [editable TRIP complaint form](#) and submit it by email.³ This form only allows a very short description of the problems you are having, but you can attach a longer statement to your email.

¹ This information only concerns abusive or discriminatory treatment by government employees. Different laws apply to airlines, train, and buses. See our flyer on [public accommodations discrimination](#) for more information.

² The government’s watch list is secret; there is no way to know for sure if you are on it. If you are, a TRIP complaint will not get you off the list. It is very difficult to get your name removed, even with a lawyer’s help.

³ You can also print and mail a complaint to DHS at the address shown [here](#), although we do not recommend this method due to the delays involved when mailing documents to the federal government.

2. Sign and date the complaint form, and attach a copy of your passport, before submitting it by email to TRIP@tsa.dhs.gov. Be sure that every document you submit has your name on it.
3. DHS will assign you a “travel redress number” to show that it investigated your complaint. NOTE: A redress number does not mean that DHS agrees with your complaint. It only shows that you filed a complaint.
4. Finally, DHS will send you a “Final Determination Letter.”⁴ This is a form letter that will say DHS investigated your complaint and made any needed changes. However, it will **not** give you any specific information about why you have been targeted, or if you are on a terrorism watch list, or what DHS did or did not do. The only way to tell if your TRIP complaint helped is to see how you are treated the next time you travel.

Some of CAIR-MA’s clients were treated better after filing a TRIP complaint – while others were not. We are sometimes asked if filing a TRIP complaint could make the situation *worse*. We have not seen that happen.

Civil Rights complaint. According to DHS, a [civil rights complaint](#) is for travelers who believe they were treated poorly due to race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or disability, or who were asked inappropriate questions or physically abused. Unlike a TRIP complaint, a civil rights complaint is useful to complain about a [specific incident](#) and ask the agencies involved to discipline their employees or change their practices. There are three ways you can file a complaint:

- Use the Civil Rights/Civil Liberties [complaint portal](#) – we recommend this.
- Fill out the editable [complaint form](#), then email or mail it to DHS (addresses on form).
- Send your own complaint by email to CRCL@dhs.gov or regular mail to: DHS CRCL Compliance Branch, 245 Murray Lane, SW Building 410, Mail Stop #0190, Washington, D.C. 20528 (not recommended, as mail can take several weeks to be received).

The DHS Civil Rights/Civil Liberties office will send you a letter that may give you some information about the incident, but you will not be told if the employee was disciplined. Instead, you may be given some general tips on how to avoid problems when you next travel. This can be frustrating but if DHS was able to identify the employee, hopefully your complaint will be added to their personnel file and may affect their employment.

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⁴ The way in which DHS responds to TRIP complaints has changed over the years. At one point, redress numbers were issued at the time the complaint was filed. At another point, the redress number was not issued until several months later, when DHS sent its Final Determination letter. Steps 3 and 4 may be done separately, or at the same time.