



**FACT SHEET:**  
**Protecting Members of the Public**  
**from Discrimination Based on**  
**Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics**

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) which protects members of the public from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department. This fact sheet describes ways this protection covers members of the public who are or are perceived to be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or of another religious group.

**Title VI's protection from race, color, or national origin discrimination extends to:**

- 1.** Members of the public who experience discrimination, including harassment, based on their actual or perceived:
  - shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or
  - citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity.
- 2.** Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin against persons of any religion, such as members of the public who are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, or Buddhist, when the discrimination, for example, involves:
  - racial, ethnic, or ancestral slurs or stereotypes;
  - how a member of the public appears, including skin color, physical features, or style of dress that reflects both ethnic and religious traditions; and
  - foreign accent; a foreign name, including names commonly associated with particular shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or speaking a foreign language.
- 3.** Because Title VI does not protect members of the public from discrimination based only on religion, OCR refers complaints of discrimination based exclusively on religion to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), which may have jurisdiction on this issue.



## U.S. Department of the Interior

### Office of Civil Rights

**Examples of the kinds of incidents that may, depending upon facts and circumstances, raise Title VI concerns include:**

While interacting with staff of a recipient of federal financial assistance, a member of the public believes that they are being discriminated against when the staff person makes antisemitic or Islamophobic comments.

At a facility managed by a recipient of federal financial assistance, Jewish members of the public are told they must pay in cash rather than by credit card, are charged higher rates than other customers, and are not provided with the same services.

A member of the public, who is Sikh and wears a turban (head covering) is called “Turban” or other names. The member of the public reports this and the recipient of federal financial assistance does not take effective actions to document and address these reports.

### **What may members of the public do if they experience discrimination based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics?**

Anyone who believes that a recipient of federal financial assistance has discriminated against a member of the public based on race, color, or national origin can file a complaint of discrimination with OCR within 180 days of the alleged discrimination.

**To file a complaint, visit <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eeo/Public-Civil-Rights>.**