

# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

## OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

### FACT SHEET: PROTECTING INDIVIDUALS FROM DISCRIMINATION BASED ON ACTUAL OR PERCEIVED SHARED ANCESTRY OR ETHNIC CHARACTERISTICS

The U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) and its Agencies enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations (collectively Title VI),<sup>1</sup> which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin (including limited English proficiency) ***in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance***. This fact sheet describes the ways in which Title VI protects individuals who are or are perceived to be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or of another religious group. This fact sheet also provides examples that may raise Title VI concerns relevant to programs or activities receiving DOC funds.

#### WHAT IS REQUIRED UNDER TITLE VI?

What is required under Title VI?

1. Title VI's protection from race, color, and national origin (including limited English proficiency) discrimination extends to individuals who experience discrimination, including harassment, based on their actual or perceived: (i) shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or (ii) citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity.
2. Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin against individuals of any religion, such as individuals who are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, or Buddhist. For example, this includes discrimination involving:
  - racial, ethnic, or ancestral slurs or stereotypes
  - how an individual looks, including skin color, physical features, or style of dress that reflects both ethnic and religious traditions
  - an accent or a name, including names commonly associated with a particular shared ancestry or ethnic characteristic, or speaking a non-English language

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<sup>1</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 2000d *et seq.* and DOC's implementing regulations at 15 C.F.R. Part 8.

3. Because Title VI does not protect individuals from discrimination based on religion, DOC may refer discrimination complaints based solely on religion to the U.S. Department of Justice, which may have jurisdiction.

## EXAMPLES OF THE KINDS OF INCIDENTS THAT MAY, DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES, RAISE TITLE VI CONCERNS

- *While applying for broadband services with staff at an organization that received financial assistance from DOC, a Sikh man, who wears a turban, overheard a staff person mocking his accent and attire. After reporting the behavior to a supervisor, the individual's application was denied.*
- *A student wearing a kippah at a University that received financial assistance from DOC was told that they must pay in cash rather than credit card when buying books at the University's bookstore because "Jewish people control the banks."*

## HOW CAN YOU REPORT DISCRIMINATION UNDER TITLE VI?



Anyone who believes they have been discriminated against based on race, color, or national origin, may file a complaint of discrimination with the DOC. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.commerce.gov/cr/programs-and-services/external-compliance-program>

***Please note this resource does not have the force and effect of law. DOC's enforcement of Title VI stems from Title VI and its implementing regulations.***