



How to File a Charter School/Authorizer Complaint

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Charter Center provides state leadership, support and oversight that promotes high quality charter schools and authorizer excellence under Minnesota’s charter school law – [Minnesota Statutes 2023, Chapter 124E](#). Individuals may file a complaint with the Charter Center if they believe a charter school or authorizer has violated the requirements of Chapter 124E. Information submitted to MDE is a matter of public record.

This document provides guidance on how to file a complaint about a charter school or an authorizer’s alleged violation(s) of Chapter 124E. MDE’s Charter Center does not review matters outside of the charter school law. Allegations of violations of other laws are handled by different divisions at MDE or by different government agencies at both the state and federal level; contact information for these agencies is provided below.

The complaint system is free. The intention of this document is to provide helpful, general information to the public. It does not constitute legal advice nor is it a substitute for consulting with a licensed attorney. The information below should not be relied upon as a comprehensive or definitive response to your specific legal situation. This document may not include a complete rendition of applicable state and federal laws.

Because MDE is a government agency, most agency business, including the handling of complaints, is a matter of public record. For this reason, subject matter in complaints will not be treated as confidential but will be used to review and take action upon complaints. Some complaints may involve private or nonpublic data. The Minnesota Data Practices Act requires that access to private and nonpublic data be limited to those with a need to know. Depending on the nature of the complaint, some information in the complaint may be redacted to screen the school, the school’s board, and/or authorizer from identifying private or nonpublic information. Complaints submitted anonymously may not be reviewed because MDE staff may need to follow up with a complainant for more information in order to initiate review of the complaint. MDE will review complaints under its jurisdiction.

Steps to Take Before Filing a Complaint

Before filing a complaint, MDE encourages individuals to attempt to resolve their concerns directly with the school by contacting:

- [School leadership](#); and/or

- The charter school’s board of directors (the legal entity in charge of the school). The board chair’s contact information can be found on the school’s website or under the school’s [Contact View on MDE-ORG](#); and/or,
- The charter school’s [authorizer](#) (the organization responsible for ensuring that the school complies with applicable laws, rules, and the charter contract).

Additionally, consider if a violation of law has occurred. If a violation of law has not occurred, MDE will have limited ability to resolve your concerns through the complaint process. An alternative to filing a complaint is to engage in conflict resolution. The Minnesota [Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution](#) posts [conflict resolution resources on its website](#). For additional assistance on conflict resolution, please [contact the Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution](#).

If Filing a Complaint

- Review this guidance document in its entirety to determine the appropriate area(s) to address your concern(s).
- For complaints that fall under the category [Complaints under MDE Jurisdiction](#) below, complainants should contact those divisions directly. Depending on the nature of the complaint, multiple divisions at MDE may be involved.
- For complaints that fall under the category [Complaints NOT under MDE Jurisdiction](#), complainants will need to contact those state or federal entities directly.
- For all other complaints, please fill out the [Charter School and/or Authorizer Complaint Form](#) or submit a written complaint.

Complaints under MDE Jurisdiction

The following types of complaints may be handled by divisions of MDE. Some of the identified divisions have complaint submission processes and timelines. Complainants will need to contact the division(s) identified below directly.

| Type of Complaint | Email Address | Phone Number | Hyperlink to website for more information and/or a complaint form |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------------|---|
| Academic Standards | Mde.academic-standards@state.mn.us | 651-582-8484 | Academic Standards webpage |
| Bullying and School Climate Concerns | EDI.Center.MDE@state.mn.us | 651-582-8314 | Ensuring Safe and Supportive Schools webpage |

| Type of Complaint | Email Address | Phone Number | Hyperlink to website for more information and/or a complaint form |
|--|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)/Federal Title | Mde.esea@state.mn.us | 651-582-8579 | Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)/Federal Title webpage |
| English Learner Education | Mde.el@state.mn.us | 651-582-8579 | English Learner Education webpage |
| Expulsion/Exclusion Appeals | mde.dispute-resolution@state.mn.us | 651-582-8689 | Appeal request information is on MDE's website |
| Financial Concerns that relate to fraud, waste, abuse, or misuse of funds (this includes financial crimes at either the state or federal level) | MDE.inspector.general@state.mn.us | Toll-free tip line: 833-819-8090 | Office of the Inspector General webpage Reports can also be sent to: Minnesota Office of the State Auditor United States Department of Education, Office of Inspector General |
| Homeless Education | mde.homelessed@state.mn.us | 651-582-8579 | McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Form |
| School Health Services | mde.healthyyouth@state.mn.us | 651-582-8735 | School Health Services |
| Special Education | Mde.dispute-resolution@state.mn.us | 651-582-8689 | Special Education Special Education Complaints webpage |
| Special Education Student Discipline (e.g. suspension, expulsion, exclusion) | MDE.Dispute-Resolution@state.mn.us | 651-582-8689 | Student Discipline webpage |

| Type of Complaint | Email Address | Phone Number | Hyperlink to website for more information and/or a complaint form |
|--|--|--------------|---|
| Student Accounting/Pupil Counts | marss@state.mn.us | 651-582-8779 | MARSS Reporting Instructions webpage |
| Student Maltreatment | Mde.student-maltreatment@state.mn.us | 651-582-8546 | Student Maltreatment webpage Student Maltreatment Reporting Form |

Complaints NOT under MDE Jurisdiction

The following types of complaints are handled by government agencies other than MDE. The identified agencies have their own complaint submission processes and timelines. Complainants will need to contact the agencies identified below directly.

| Type of Complaint | Contact Information |
|---|---|
| Administrative Law and Workers' Compensation | Minnesota Office of Administrative Hearings |
| Charity or Nonprofit Status | Office of the Minnesota Attorney General |
| Data Practices and Open Meeting Law | Minnesota Department of Administration, Data Practices Office |
| Employee Discrimination | Minnesota Department of Human Rights United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission |
| Employee-Employer Mediation Services | Minnesota Bureau of Mediation Services |
| Employee Health or Retirement Benefits | United States Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) |

| Type of Complaint | Contact Information |
|--|---|
| Other Employment Issues (e.g., unpaid wages, occupational safety and health (OSHA)) | Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) DLI worker rights and protections (e.g., wage claim) complaints webpage DLI OSHA complaints web page |
| Family Education Rights and Privacy ACT (FERPA) | Student Privacy Policy Office |
| Food and Nutrition Discrimination | United States Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights |
| School Administrator Ethics | Minnesota Board of School Administrators |
| Section 504 | United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights |
| Student/Family Discrimination | Minnesota Department of Human Rights United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights |
| Teacher Ethics and Licensure Compliance | Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board |
| Truancy | Information can be found on MDE's Student Discipline webpage ; however, you will need to contact the school district in which you reside or your county attorney. |
| Violation of Federal Law (including hate crimes, organized crime, threats to national security, online scams, etc.) | Federal Bureau of Investigation Electronic Tip Form Please note: Federal financial crimes can be reported to MDE's Office of Inspector General, as noted in the Complaints under MDE Jurisdiction section. |

How to File a Complaint

If your complaint involves charter law, or does not fall under the areas identified above, please [complete the Charter School and/or Authorizer Complaint Form](#) and email the completed form to mde.charterschools@state.mn.us.

If you do not have access or the ability to submit the form electronically, you can provide a written statement.

Written Statement Requirements

Include your name, address, and telephone number in addition to the name of the charter school and/or authorizer. Your written complaint must include specific facts supporting the claim that a charter school and/or authorizer has violated a requirement of state charter law along with a proposed resolution to the alleged violation.

Where to Send the Written, Signed Complaint

By mail or in person:

Minnesota Department of Education
Attn: Charter Center
400 Northeast Stinson Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55413

How Long Will It Take for MDE to Resolve the Complaint?

MDE generally has 60 business days to resolve the complaint. This timeline starts the day MDE receives the complaint. MDE may extend this 60-business-day timeline.

How Can I Get More Information?

For more information, you may call MDE at 651-582-8297, email mde.charterschools@state.mn.us, or visit the [MDE Charter Schools webpage](#).

Additional Resources

Alternative Dispute Resolution

The [Minnesota Department of Administration, Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution \(OCDR\)](#) was founded to promote the use of means other than litigation for resolving disputes affecting the public interest. OCDR offers preliminary consultation at no charge to explore the issue under dispute and how OCDR can help. Contact 651-539-1404 or katie.pratt@state.mn.us. OCDR staff will explore the nature of the conflict, the potential for a collaborative approach, and how OCDR services fit with those needs.

The [OCDR website also provides alternative dispute resolution resources](#), including lists of other third-party organizations that provide mediation, dispute resolution, and conflict management services.

Legal Assistance

MDE maintains a [legal assistance resource list](#). This list provides information about legal assistance, advocacy services, and lawyer referral services. This list is not exhaustive. MDE cannot provide recommendations on which resource, if any, you should choose. Additionally, MDE is not endorsing or vouching for any person or organization on this list.

Whistleblower Protections

You may have concerns about retaliation as a complainant. The Minnesota legislature adopted statutory protections under [Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 181.932](#) that prohibit employer retaliation against employee whistleblowers. Prohibited retaliation includes discharge, discipline, threats, or other discrimination, including penalizing employees regarding compensation, terms, conditions, location or privileges of employment. Several other Minnesota statutes contain anti-retaliation provisions. Employees who engage in protected activities (usually filing a complaint or testifying) under laws in the following subject areas are protected from retaliation:

- Discrimination (Minn. Stat. 363A.15 [2023])
- Labor relations (Minn. Stat. 179.12) [2023] as amended by the Laws of Minnesota 2024, chapter 110, article 5, section 7)
- Maltreatment of minors (Minn. Stat. 260E [2023] as amended by the Laws of Minnesota 2024)
- Minimum wage (Minn. Stat. 177.32 [2023])
- Occupational safety and health (Minn. Stat. 182.654, subd. 9 and 11 [2023])
- Vulnerable adults (Minn. Stat. 626.557 [2023])
- Wage discrimination (equal pay for equal work) (Minn. Stat. 181.67 [2023])
- Workers' compensation (Minn. Stat. 176.82 [2023])

A private contract or collective bargaining agreement may also protect employees from certain forms of retaliation. Additionally, Minnesota common law prohibits employees from being discharged for a reason contrary to public policy: an employee may not be terminated for refusing to commit a criminal act.

Generally, if you have a whistleblower claim you would like to pursue, contact a lawyer. Whistleblower or retaliation claims can be filed in appropriate courts, within the period specified by the statute of limitations, typically two years for most claims.

Several state agencies, such as the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, the Minnesota Office of Administrative Hearings, and the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry also process claims. For example, if your whistleblower concern addresses occupational safety and health, you should contact the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI). If you believe you have a claim, the lawsuit must be filed within 30 days of the retaliatory action. DLI will investigate and may schedule a hearing before an administrative law judge.

The federal U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration also provides whistleblower protection for claims. For more information, contact:

The Whistleblower Protection Program
[Whistleblowers Protection Program website](#)
1-800-321-6742 (OSHA)