



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, 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 look into matters outside of the charter law. Allegations of violations of other laws are handled 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 law.

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 investigate 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 investigated, because MDE staff may need to follow up with a complainant for more information in order to pursue or investigate a complaint. MDE will investigate complaints under its jurisdiction and notify all parties.

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). This information can be found on a 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).

If Filing a Complaint

- Review this guidance document in its entirety to determine the appropriate area(s) to address your concerns.
- For complaints that fall under the category *Complaints under MDE Jurisdiction* below, complainants may contact those divisions directly. Depending on the nature of the complaint, multiple divisions at MDE may be involved.
- For complaints that fall under the categories within *Complaints NOT under MDE Jurisdiction*, complainants will need to contact those state or federal entities directly.
- For all other complaints, please fill out the [online 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	651-582-8749	Academic Standards page
Bullying Concerns School Safety Technical Assistance Center	Mde.sstac@state.mn.us	651-582-8364	Bullying Concerns webpage
Expulsion/Exclusion Appeals	Mde.compliance-assisstance@state.mn.us	651-582-8689	Appeal request information is on MDE's website
Special Education	Mde.compliance-assisstance@state.mn.us	651-582-8689	Special Education complaints
Special Education Student Discipline (e.g. suspension, expulsion, exclusion)	Mde.compliance-assisstance@state.mn.us	651-582-8689	Student Discipline page

Type of Complaint	Email Address	Phone Number	Hyperlink to website for more information and/or a complaint form
Student Maltreatment Reports	Mde.student-maltreatment@state.mn.us	651-582-8546	Student Maltreatment Information Student Maltreatment Report Form

Complaints NOT under MDE Jurisdiction

The following types of complaints are handled by governmental agencies outside of the Minnesota Department of Education. The identified departments have their own complaint submission processes and timelines. Complainants will need to contact the departments identified below directly.

Type of Complaint	Contact Information
Administrative Law and Workers' Compensation	Minnesota Office of Administrative Hearings
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)
Other Employment Issues (e.g., unpaid wages, occupational safety and health – OSHA)	Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry For labor standards (e.g., wages) complaints page For OSHA complaints page
Family Education Rights and Privacy ACT (FERPA)	Family Policy Compliance Office

Type of Complaint	Contact Information
Financial Concerns (including fraud, waste, misuse, etc.)	United States Department of Education, Office of Inspector General Minnesota Office of the State Auditor
Food and Nutrition Discrimination	United States Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary
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 website ; however, you will need to contact the school district in which you reside or your county attorney

How to File a Complaint

If your complaint involves charter law, or doesn't fall under the areas identified above, please [use the online form to submit a complaint to MDE](#). By selecting the "submit" button on the form, you have filed your complaint electronically with MDE.

If you do not have access or the ability to submit the form electronically, you can provide a signed, 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
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, Minnesota 55113-4266

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 or go to the [Minnesota Department of Education, Charter Center web page](#).

Whistleblower Protections

You may have concerns about retaliation as a complainant. The Minnesota legislature has adopted statutory protections under [Minnesota Statutes, section 181.932](#) that prohibit employer retaliation against 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](#))
- Labor relations ([Minn. Stat. § 179.12\(4\)](#))
- Maltreatment of minors ([Minn. Stat. § 626.556 Subd. 4a](#))
- Minimum wage ([Minn. Stat. § 177.32](#))
- Occupational safety and health ([Minn. Stat. § 182.654\(9\), \(11\)](#))
- Vulnerable adults ([Minn. Stat. § 626.557](#))
- Wage discrimination (equal pay for equal work) ([Minn. Stat. § 181.67](#))
- Workers' compensation ([Minn. Stat. § 176.82](#))

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 2 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 & Industry also process claims. For

example, if your whistleblower concern addresses occupational safety and health, you should contact the Minnesota Department of Labor & 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)