

Hate Crimes & Bias Incidents

What is a Hate Crime?

In Washington, a hate crime is the malicious and intentional assault, property damage, or threat of assault or property damage to another person because of that person's perceived race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, or mental, physical, or sensory disability.

A hate crime is a felony in Washington, carrying a maximum sentence of five years in prison and/or a \$100,000 fine. A victim of a hate crime may also bring a civil lawsuit against the perpetrator for actual damages, punitive damages up to \$100,000, and reasonable attorneys' fees and costs incurred for bringing the lawsuit ([RCW 9A.36.080](#)).

What is a Bias Incident?

In Washington, a bias incident is a hostile expression of animus toward another person **based on the other person's actual or perceived race, color, creed, religion, ancestry, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, sex, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability** ([RCW 43.10.305\(5\)\(a\)](#)). The list of characteristics include the characteristics under Washington's hate crimes law and the protected classes under the Washington Law Against Discrimination ([RCW 49.60.030\(1\)](#)).

"Hostile expression of animus" means expressing an opinion of hate or bias in a rude, unfriendly, or aggressive manner. **A bias incident is an incident that does not rise to the level of a crime or criminal act.** Examples of bias incidents include, but are not limited to:

- Using insulting language towards someone else based on their perceived characteristics or protected class.
- Creating racist or insulting images or drawings based on someone's perceived characteristics or protected class.
- Mocking someone with a disability or someone's cultural norms or practices.

Hate Crimes & Bias Incidents Hotline

The Washington Attorney General's Office (AGO) was directed to establish a Hate Crimes & Bias Incidents Hotline under [Senate Bill \(SB\) 5427 \(2024\)](#), passed by the legislature in 2024 and codified at [RCW 43.10.305](#). The Hotline must provide callers with information and referrals to local, victim-centered, culturally competent, and trauma-informed services, and, to the extent possible, be accessible in multiple languages. The Hotline will be available in Clark, King, and Spokane counties starting July 1, 2025, and available statewide starting January 1, 2027. **The Hotline is not an emergency line, and callers will be directed to call 911 if they are reporting an emergency.**

Anyone who has been a victim of hate or bias may call the Hotline to report an incident and receive information about services, regardless of immigration status. Interpretation services will be available. The service providers that the Hotline will refer callers to will provide a wide range of services, including physical and mental health; legal aid; culturally relevant support; and victim advocacy.

Personal identifying information reported to the Hotline is protected and will not be released publicly. This information includes name, prior legal name, alias, mother's maiden name, date or place of birth, residence, mailing address, telephone number, email address, social security number, driver's license number, bank account number, and other identifying information ([RCW 43.10.305\(5\)\(g\)](#)).

Required by the law, the Hotline must ask whether the caller has reported to law enforcement and if they'd like to do so. **The hotline will refer to law enforcement only if the caller consents** and will only share any identifying information that the caller wants to share. **Law enforcement is required to share the hotline's contact information** with anyone who reports an incident of hate or bias to them.