

HOW DO YOU FILE A COMPLAINT?

If you wish to file a complaint, we encourage you to fill out South Carolina's Civil Rights Discrimination Complaint Form. These forms can be found in DSS offices, as well as online at this address:
www.state.sc.us/dss/forms/files/2601.pdf

The information needed to file a complaint includes: what happened to you, the date it happened, and the employee(s) you feel may be responsible for the action. If you cannot get a form when you first have a concern or when an incident(s) occurs, write this information down while it is still fresh in your mind. If you need help with your complaint, you can call our agency's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) at 1-800-311-7220 for assistance. **You may file your complaint using our form, or using any other written format (letter, email, etc.)** We encourage you to file your complaint as soon as possible so that we may begin to review your complaint quickly. Please mail your complaint to:

Director, Office of Civil Rights
South Carolina Department of
Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202
Voice: 1-800-311-7220
TTY: 1-800-311-7219

You may also file a complaint with HHS, and you may either send the same Civil Rights Discrimination Form, or use any other written format (letter, email, etc.) to either the main office at this address:

United States Department of
Health and Human Services
Office for Civil Rights
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington D.C. 20201
1-800-368-1019
TDD: 1-800-537-7697
Email: OCRmail@hhs.gov

or to this regional address:

United States Department of
Health and Human Services
Office for Civil Rights, Region IV
61 Forsyth Street, S.W.
Atlanta Federal Center,
Suite 3B70
Atlanta, GA 30303-8909
Voice: (404) 562-7886
TTY: (404) 331-2867

The law also forbids retaliation at any point against an individual or family who complains about actions they believe to be discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin.

Thank you for considering adoption or becoming a foster parent. If you wish more information, please feel free to call us at 1-800-277-0144.

Multiethnic Placement Act

ARE YOU A PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE OR FOSTER PARENT?

The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, as amended, says that an adoption and foster care agency cannot deny a person the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent based on the race, color, or national origin of the parent or the child in foster care. DSS may not delay or deny placement of a child based on race, color, or national origin.

ARE YOU CONSIDERING ADOPTING OR FOSTERING A CHILD WHOSE RACE COLOR OR NATIONAL ORIGIN IS DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OWN?

Children come in all sizes, shapes, races, colors, and national origins. While all children have differences, they all have in common the need to grow up in a home that is loving, nurturing, understanding, and respectful.

DSS has helped many children become members of foster and adoptive families of a different race, color or national origin. Such placements have been very successful for both the parents and the children.

Our goal is to place children in safe and nurturing homes. Denying or delaying a foster or adoptive placement based on race, color, or national origin is prohibited by our policy and by the law.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ACTIONS THAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED DISCRIMINATION?

DSS is not permitted to discriminate against a child or family on the basis of race, color or national origin in adoption or foster care placements. Discrimination is prohibited in all phases of the placement process, including, but not limited to, the home study, the consideration of the family for a match with a child, and services after the match has been made. DSS may not consider the prospective parent's or child's race, color or national origin when making a foster care or adoption placement assessment or decision. In the rare circumstance that DSS considers the race, color or national origin of a parent or child, DSS is required to conduct a detailed and individualized assessment of why such consideration is in the child's best interest.

Some examples of impermissible practices are:

- ruling out placement with prospective parents because of a birth's mother's preferences for a specific race, color or national origin;
- adding extra criteria to the assessment of prospective parents who want to foster or adopt a child of a different race, color or national origin. This may include:
 - assessing the demographics of a prospective parent's neighborhood;
 - assessing the demographics of the prospective parent's friends;
 - requiring a prospective parent to justify providing care for a child of a different race, color or national origin;

- assessing a prospective parent's 'cultural competence' or 'cultural background' that is related to race, color or national origin;
- using skin color to match a child with prospective parents; and
- ruling out placement of a child with prospective parents because of the child's statement of a race, color or national origin preference without an individualized assessment of the child that shows such a consideration is truly in the child's best interests.

DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF YOUR RACE, COLOR OR NATIONAL ORIGIN?

Our agency pledges not to discriminate in our adoption or foster care decisions on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Not only is discrimination inappropriate, such discrimination is in violation of policy and law. If you feel that any decision made, or any action taken, is in violation of this policy and law, you have a right to voice your concerns and file a complaint with our agency and/or with the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).