



AG Healey Issues Guidance to Schools to Help Prevent and Address Hate and Bias

Provides Guidance and Resources to Assist Schools

BOSTON — To help ensure that all students across Massachusetts feel safe and supported, Attorney General Maura Healey's Office [today issued guidance](#) to school officials about their legal obligations to prevent and address hate and bias incidents at their educational institutions. At a time of heightened strain in school communities, the AG's Office is providing guidance and resources to help schools respond properly if a hate incident occurs.

The AG's [Guidance on Schools' Legal Obligations to Prevent and Address Hate and Bias Incidents](#), which was sent today to school superintendents, charter school leaders, and school administrators, describes how schools must respond to hate and bias incidents involving students and what proactive steps schools must take to prevent such incidents. It also highlights several best practices that schools should consider for preventing and responding to hate incidents. The AG's Office is also [offering a directory](#) of relevant training and other resources. The Office wants to ensure that all school officials have the information and tools that they need if a hate incident occurs.

"I commend our school leaders, teachers, and staff across the state who have been on the front lines of providing essential educational and social-emotional services during this time of uncertainty and distress amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and as we're all grappling with racial injustice and its negative effects on individuals and society as whole," said **AG Healey**. "We want to make sure schools have the information and support they need to address and prevent incidents of hate and bias and ensure that every student can learn in a nurturing and welcoming environment, free from bullying and harassment."

The AG's Office has recently engaged with school administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members who are concerned about hate incidents in the state's elementary and secondary schools and who are re-examining the role of schools in preventing and addressing these incidents. Student misconduct that involves hate, bias, or prejudice can have a devastating impact on victims and can severely disrupt the school environment. The AG's Guidance is designed to assist schools in their continuing efforts to combat hate and foster a safe, supportive, and inclusive educational environment, consistent with their obligations under state law.

The AG's Guidance, which [can be found here](#), describes schools' obligations to prevent and respond to hate and bias incidents under Massachusetts's anti-bullying and anti-discrimination laws; details required, affirmative steps to help create a positive school climate and prevent these incidents; and provides examples of best practices to implement education, prevention, and remediation measures. A list of additional resources for schools [can be found here](#).

The AG's Office is committed to securing the civil rights of all students in Massachusetts. If you have questions about this Guidance or other civil rights concerns, you may contact the Office [online](#) or at **617-963-2917**.

STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT:

"Schools should be safe and welcoming places for all students, educators, and families. The guidance announced today will help districts with the critical tasks of preventing and addressing bias-related incidents, which in turn will help all students feel valued, capable, and ready to learn." – **Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education**

"A safe, welcoming learning environment is crucial to education at every level. Acts of bullying and harassment have no place in our schools, especially when they involve bigotry, bias, or hate, and we as adults must take every appropriate step to identify and act on them swiftly and properly." – **Secretary of Public Safety and Security Thomas Turco, who serves as co-chair of the Governor Baker's Task Force on Hate Crimes**

"Among the most important work that schools do is ensuring that all students feel safe and supported. We welcome this guidance from the Attorney General's Office to assist us in that work. In addition to helping schools respond effectively and thoroughly to any hate incidents that arise, the guidance details laws, regulations, and best practices around promoting inclusive school environments that help prevent such incidents from happening in the first place. In these extraordinary times especially, we are appreciative of this information and guidance, as we continue our work on combating hate and advancing equity and inclusivity for all students." – **Thomas Scott, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents**

"Over the last few years, I have heard from colleagues across the Commonwealth who have shared concerns regarding increases in incidents of hate and discrimination within their respective districts. The guidance provided by the Attorney General's Office serves as a tool to remind districts of their legal obligation to establish clear systems and processes that promptly investigate incidents. The guidance goes further in making critical suggestions where districts can focus their efforts in developing an inclusive and welcoming community, such as the inclusion of anti-discrimination and anti-hate education in the curriculum and professional development, as well as training on how to have difficult conversations that allow students to speak through a lens of justice and a language of love. As educational leaders we have a duty to not simply denounce hate, but to actively work to dismantle it, and to ensure that all students can access a safe learning environment. I would encourage my peers across the Commonwealth to use this guidance to review existing practices and policies to ensure that they are effectively meeting their legal obligations." – **Joseph Corazzini, Assistant Superintendent of Equity Diversity and Community Development, Framingham Public Schools**

"The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) within the Massachusetts School Administrators Association (MSAA) and the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) supports the Attorney General Office's guidance on preventing and addressing hate and bias in schools. The mission and goals of the DEIC interrelate fundamentally with the newly released guidance. MSAA and MIAA also appreciate the best practices and resources offered by the Attorney General's Office, particularly as they will serve as a significant instructional approach for school communities." – **Michael Rubin, Assistant Director, Massachusetts School Administrators Association, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Liaison, and Kathleen E. McSweeney, Assistant Director, Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Liaison**

"While it has always been essential for schools to respond to and proactively work to prevent hate and bias incidents, it is increasingly clear at this moment in our nation's history that the role of schools in this work is more important than ever. We commend the Office of the Attorney General for its commitment to combating hate and bias, so

that all students in our Commonwealth can be guaranteed access to inclusive, safe, and high-quality learning environments.” – **Tim Nicolette, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association**

“In clear and comprehensive language, the Attorney General has given us a blueprint for ensuring that school district policies and procedures are consistent with our legal obligations and drive action on behalf of some of our most vulnerable students. This will be invaluable not only to school leaders and policymakers, but also to parents and students who want to take an active role in promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of children.” – **Glenn Koocher, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of School Committees**

“Hate and bias should have no home in America, and that’s especially true in our schools. As Massachusetts educators, we applaud the Office of the Attorney General for issuing clear and helpful guidance on what schools must and can do to combat incidents of hate and bias, including bullying and harassment. We look forward to working with school stakeholders to implement the guidance faithfully, which will make schools safer and better places for students and staff alike.” – **Beth Kontos, President of the 23,000-member AFT Massachusetts**

“We commend the Attorney General’s Office for providing these much-needed guidelines to help schools better meet their obligations to prevent and respond to bias-related bullying and harassment. This guide serves as an important reminder that schools cannot wait for a hate incident to occur and must proactively review their practices to ensure that they are consistent with fostering an inclusive and respectful school culture.” – **Robert Trestan, ADL New England Regional Director**

“All students, no matter their race, ethnicity, or other identities, need to feel safe, supported, valued, and respected at school, and we have laws and regulations in place to ensure that they do. We appreciate this guidance from the Attorney General’s Office to remind schools of their legal obligations and to encourage best practices that improve school climate and promote equity. Now more than ever, it is a commitment and a cause we must face head on.” – **Tanisha M. Sullivan, President, NAACP Boston Branch**

“Lawyers for Civil Rights commends the Attorney General’s Office for its critical and timely work to prevent incidents of hate in the school setting. Like their communities, students of color are hurting now more than ever, and schools must do more to support and protect these vulnerable learners. Preventing and addressing bias-based harassment is required under the law, and legal advocates are watching.” – **Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, Executive Director, Lawyers for Civil Rights**

“Proactive work to create safe and inclusive learning environments is foundational to preventing bullying and to avoiding hate incidents. Part of creating a safe environment also includes addressing bullying promptly and effectively when it does arise. LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable to both bullying and to over-discipline. GLAD appreciates this new guidance which gives schools tools to implement best practices, to create inclusive environments, and to appropriately and effectively respond to bullying and hate. It is critical that schools work to create a true climate of inclusivity and safety so that students can access education that is the foundation of their long-term well-being.” – **Polly Crozier, Senior Staff Attorney, GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders**

“Over the years, I have worked with many school districts in their crisis moments—after a hate incident has occurred—as well as on their prevention efforts. This guidance from the Attorney General’s Office provides clear and important information to help schools respond effectively to these incidents and to keep them from happening in the first place. For LGBTQ students, who experience high rates of bullying, school leaders have an enormous role to play in creating safe and supportive environments and

ensuring that hate has no place in their school communities.” – **Jeff Perrotti, Founding Director, Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students**

“Attorney General Maura Healey’s guidance is much needed to help thoughtfully and effectively address and prevent hate in public schools. It’s also an important message that schools have legal obligations to provide a safe place for all students to learn and thrive. It’s a wonderful world when students have a solid foundation to learn early on that hate and bias are not acceptable.” – **Anh Vu Sawyer, Executive Director, Southeast Asian Coalition of Massachusetts**

“As an active member of the Worcester community and the Attorney General’s Racial Justice and Equity Advisory Council, I am pleased to see this guidance and information made available to schools in Central Massachusetts and across the state. I am especially appreciative that the Attorney General’s Office sought and received input from a diverse range of stakeholders in developing this guidance. Hate and bias incidents have no place in our schools, and this guidance reminds school leaders of their power and responsibility to address and prevent any such incidents to ensure that all students feel seen, valued, and respected.” – **Joyce McNickles, Ed.D., Visiting Associate Professor of Politics and Social Justice, Regis College and Chief Executive Officer, McNickles and Associates**

“This guidance from the Attorney General’s Office helps adults within school communities immediately address hate incidents among students and set an example that such acts are unacceptable. Young people served by the New American Association of Massachusetts and across the state deserve to feel safe and respected in their schools, not targeted because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or anything else. It is important for school leaders to identify and address hate and bias and practice having difficult conversations among the entire school community to foster a sense of safety and inclusiveness for all students.” – **Natasha Soolkin, Executive Director, New American Association of Massachusetts**

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