



MUSLIM ADVOCATES

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:

A Guide to Seeking Religious Accommodations for Ramadan In School or College

Legal Rights

During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslim students may need adjustments from their schools and colleges to accommodate their religious practices. The Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects your right to exercise your religious beliefs; and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects you from religious discrimination, harassment and retaliation.



Religious Accommodation

A religious accommodation means reaching an agreement with your college or school that enables you to practice your religious beliefs in a manner that does not severely interfere with your education.

Examples of Religious Accommodations: Allowing you to take an exam at a different time if the scheduled time conflicts with Suhoor or Iftar, allowing you to be absent on Eid without penalty or permitting you a prayer break during class.

Public vs. Private

Generally, public schools and colleges have greater legal obligations to accommodate students' religious practices than private schools and universities. The Free Exercise Clause applies to public schools and colleges. Title VI applies to public schools and colleges but also applies to federally funded institutions. In addition to federal laws, some state and local laws may protect your right to religious practice, and those may also apply to private bodies. You should always review your school or university's handbook on how to request a religious accommodation.



WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

Do You Have a Right to a Prayer Room and Other Religious Accommodations?

You may be entitled to a prayer room. This depends on several factors that are beyond the scope of this pamphlet. Though we cannot give you a simple and definitive answer on this issue, you can still make a request for prayer space or other religious accommodations not enumerated here.

Is a Public School or College Required to Accommodate a Student's Absence for Eid?

Generally, yes. The Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment and certain state laws will, in many situations, require public schools and colleges to allow students time off from classes without penalty. This includes giving the student a reasonable amount of time to make up any missed assignments or exams.

Is a Private School or College Required to Accommodate a Student's Absence for Eid?

Generally, no. Private schools and colleges are not bound by the Free Exercise Clause. If a private school or college is bound by Title VI due to the federal funds it receives, it has a duty to not discriminate due to your religion, which includes not denying you an accommodation that was given to a student with a different religion or one with no religion. Moreover, state or local laws may exist to protect your right to religious accommodation or to protect you from religious discrimination. You should also consult your school or college's policies or handbooks, which may include a contractual right to religious accommodation.

From Whom Should I Request an Accommodation?

Consult your school or college's handbook or policy. If you cannot find relevant information there, send your request to the instructors whose accommodation you are seeking. For schools, send your letter to the principal, as well. For colleges, make sure you include the Dean of Student Affairs in your request.

What if I Feel Discriminated Against or I am Harassed because of my Religion?

You should seek legal assistance. You can also file a complaint with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights or the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.