

Civil Rights Law



What is Civil Rights Law?

Those lawyers who practice civil rights law investigate complaints related to the discrimination of certain protected classes including race, sex, religion, age, disability, and national origin. Civil rights lawyers also represent victims of discrimination in state and federal courts and the Supreme Court ([Legal Information Institute](#)).

Civil rights law is a broad field of law, so many lawyers choose to further specialize in one of the following areas: criminal justice, education discrimination, employment discrimination, housing discrimination, immigration law, lending and finance discrimination, or voting rights.

Most aspects of civil rights law are derived from the United States Constitution and federal laws, though some states and cities have extended certain civil rights statutes to protect additional classes, or to apply to additional settings. Enforcement of federal civil rights law is overseen by the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. Of course, civil rights divisions in other government agencies investigate civil rights violation complaints in their specific areas. States also have their own investigative agencies to manage violations of state civil rights laws ([Hill et al](#)).

Civil rights law is an evolving field. In addition to federal and state legislation, civil rights law is also impacted by decisions of state and federal courts, and those of the Supreme Court.

Where Do Civil Rights Lawyers Work?

Government

Department of Education [Office for Civil Rights](#)

Department of Housing and Urban Development [Fair Housing/Civil Rights](#)

Department of Health and Human Services [Office for Civil Rights](#)

Department of Justice [Civil Rights Division](#)

Department of Transportation [Departmental Office of Civil Rights](#)

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [Jobs and Internships](#)

[Tennessee Human Rights Commission](#)

Private Sector

Large organizations such as the American Civil Liberties

Union ([ACLU](#)) and the NAACP [Legal Defense Fund](#)

Smaller or local public interest firms

Resume Boosters for Civil Rights Law

Join *The University of Memphis Law Review*

Join the Public Action Law Society and participate in Alternative Spring Break

Clerk with a federal judge

Intern or extern with a federal agency

Intern or extern with Memphis Area Legal Services

Complete at least 60 *pro bono* hours to obtain a special commendation at graduation

What Classes Should I Take?

Civil Rights Law	Labor Law
Education Law	Negotiation and Mediation
Fair Employment Practices	Employment Law
Federal Courts	Federal Discrimination Seminar
Immigration Law	

Civil Rights Law Resources



Professional Associations

American Bar Association

All University of Memphis law students have free membership to the [American Bar Association](#). Their website provides routinely updated information and interest-specific career advice. Join different sections to find out what they offer. Check out the [Civil Rights and Social Justice Section](#).

Links to Legal Non-Profits

The [American Immigration Lawyers Association \(AILA\)](#) consists of 15,000 law professors and practicing attorneys with special interest or experience in immigration law. The association advocates for fair immigration policies before Congress, federal agencies, and the public. [Students may join while in law school](#). Members may join interest groups, get matched with a mentor, and get support for starting an immigration practice.

[The National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers](#) advocates for criminal justice reform. [Students may join while in law school](#).

[The National Employment Lawyers Association](#) supports workers' rights lawyers. [Students may join while in law school](#).

The [Center for Constitutional Rights](#) stands with social justice movements and communities. [The Bertha Justice Fellowship](#) is a postgraduate opportunity recruiting one year in advance from September to late December. It also offers the Ella Baker Summer Internship Program.

[Equal Justice Works](#) brings together an extensive network of law students, lawyers, legal services organizations, and financial supporters to promote lifelong commitment to public service and equal justice through national public interest [career fair](#) and facilitates summer and postgraduate [fellowships](#) for lawyers and law students.

You can find more civil rights law jobs at [PSJD.org](#), a unique online clearinghouse for law students and lawyers to connect with public interest job listings and career-building resources. .

Civil Rights Law Articles

"We need lawyers' dedication now more than ever, Rep. John Lewis says in accepting Thurgood Marshall Award" ([Speech summary and video](#)).

In this speech, Rep. John Lewis described the importance of civil rights lawyers during important moments in his life. August 11, 2019. American Bar Association.

["Why I Became a Civil Rights Attorney"](#)

This article was written by Abre' Conner. American Bar Association.