Civil Rights Complaint Procedure

Purpose

Discrimination is defined as different treatment which makes a distinction of one person or group of persons from others; either intentionally, by neglect, or by actions or lack of actions based on the federally protected classes. A protected class refers to any person or group of people who have characteristics for which discrimination is prohibited based on a law, regulation or an executive order. A sponsoring organization is prohibited from discriminating based on federally protected classes specific to child nutrition programs, which includes race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Policy

Cotter Schools ensures the following civil rights requirements are met:

- Eliminates barriers and discrimination that prevent or deter people from receiving benefits of a government-sponsored or funded program.
- Provides equal treatment to all applicants, participants, and beneficiaries in the delivery of programs and services of a federal program.
- Ensures that all applicants and participants understand their rights and responsibilities as described in FNS 113-1: Civil Rights Compliance and Enforcement guidance document.
- Shows respect and dignity to all child nutrition program participants or potential participants.

Complaint Procedure

If anyone who participates or wants to participate in the program believes they or someone they know has been discriminated against based on the federally protected classes listed above, they have a right to file a complaint within 180 days of the alleged discrimination. The complainant and complaint must be kept confidential.

Cotter Schools will receive civil rights complaints that have been submitted written or verbally. Anonymous complaints must be accepted and should be handled as any other complaint.

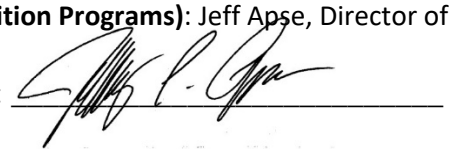
A person who wishes to submit a written complaint will be referred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Program Discrimination Complaint Form.

If a complaint is received verbally and the complainant does not want to put the allegations in writing themselves, Cotter Schools will complete the following three steps:

1. Transcribe the elements of the complaint, ensuring the following information is included:
    a. Contact Information (name, address, phone number, and/or email address of complainant) unless the complaint is anonymous.
    b. Indication if the complaint was made verbally or in-person.
    c. Name of site and location of the incident.
    d. Nature of the incident.
    e. Basis for alleged discrimination (race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), age, disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity).
    f. Names, titles, business addresses, and phone numbers of any person who may have knowledge of the discriminatory action.
    g. Date(s) when the alleged actions occurred. If the discriminatory action is ongoing, include the duration of such actions.
2. Submit the complaint to the USDA by mail or fax (information on page 2 of complaint form) or Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) at mde.fns@state.mn.us within five working days for complaints alleging unlawful discrimination that include age as a basis of discrimination and five calendar days of receipt for all other civil rights complaints.
3. Maintain records of all civil rights complaints in a secure location.

All civil rights complaints will be processed and closed within 90 days of receipt. A decision letter will be sent to the complainant.

Name and Title of Person with Child Nutrition Program Authority (signed the Sponsor-State Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs): Jeff Apse, Director of Finance & Human Resources

Signature: 

This procedure was initiated on 12/01/23.

For more information, refer to the Minnesota Department of Education's Civil Rights Webpage.