

# Section 504

## What is Section 504?

Section 504 protects people with disabilities from discrimination. This law applies anywhere that receives any amount of funding from the federal government. These places include schools, hospitals, doctors' offices, housing, and more.

Some of the rules included in 504 for disability discrimination protection include:

- Schools must include students with disabilities and help them learn.
- Doctors and schools must have sign language interpreters for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing who sign. Videos must have captions.
- Doctors must give clear information to disabled people. This includes people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Websites for schools and hospitals must work for people who are blind and low vision.
- Doctors and hospitals cannot stop helping someone because they have a disability.
- Doctors and hospitals must have tools and machines that work for wheelchair users. This includes machines that check for cancer.

## What qualifies as a disability under Section 504?

Under Section 504 a disability is a physical or mental impairment that greatly limits one or more major life activities. Essentially:

1. **Physical or Mental Impairment:** This includes any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss impacting body systems.
2. **Substantial Limitation:** The impairment must considerably restrict a major life activity, which might include walking, seeing, hearing, or learning.
3. **Major Life Activities:** These activities cover a broad spectrum, from basic tasks like eating and sleeping to more complex activities such as working and communicating.

Some examples include physical disabilities, ADHD, anxiety, and learning disabilities like dyslexia. The definition is left broad to be as expansive as possible.



## Overlap with Other Laws

Section 504 has some overlap with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and IDEA. ADA extends 504 protections to employers and public spaces, like stores and museums. If a person is covered by 504, they are also protected by ADA. IDEA can offer students an individualized education program (IEP) tailored to meet their unique needs. However, it's harder to qualify for IDEA than Section 504 because a child must have a disability that falls into one of thirteen specific categories to apply. IDEA is only available through 12th grade and does not apply to college.

## Challenges to Section 504

In September 2024, 17 states filed suit against the Biden administration over updates to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, namely inclusion of gender dysphoria as a disability. Other rules challenged in the lawsuit include rules that require medical services to be made more accessible, including chairs and tables that can be used by people with mobility impairments, and kiosks and websites for medical providers that can be available to blind users. Additionally, the rules that address improving integration of severely disabled people into their communities, rather than placing them in nursing homes, have been challenged.

However, the lawsuit also calls the entirety of Section 504 unconstitutional. The 17 states have not stated exactly how it is unconstitutional.

As of February 25, 2025, the lawsuit is on hold with no further action or decisions scheduled.

## Additional Resources

- [Section 504 | U.S. Department of Education](#)
- [The Civil Rights of Students With Hidden Disabilities and Section 504 | U.S. Department of Education](#)
- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Final Rule: Section by Section Fact Sheet for Recipients of Financial Assistance from HHS | HHS.gov](#)
- [2025.02.21 Update on the Texas v. Becerra Lawsuit](#)

