

COMBATTING HATE IN MASSACHUSETTS

The Massachusetts Attorney General's Office is committed to addressing hate incidents whenever and wherever they occur. Along with the impact on individual victims, hate incidents threaten the safety, well-being, and freedom of entire communities. Hate will not be tolerated.

Frequently Asked Questions About: Doxxing

What is doxxing?

“Doxxing” refers to the process of collecting sensitive information about a targeted person and publishing it – usually on the internet, frequently on a social media platform – without the target’s authorization. The information used to dox a person may be gathered from publicly available sources or obtained by gaining access to private records and databases. Doxxing is generally carried out for the purpose of subjecting the target to public ridicule, harassment, or other adverse consequences.

Although doxxing can take many forms, a typical doxxing incident might involve the publication of:

- Personally identifying information about a targeted person, including their name, address, contact information, and employment information.
- Material intended to shame and humiliate the targeted person or draw attention to their involvement with some allegedly objectionable group or conduct.
- A suggestion that people reading the doxxing material contact the targeted person, their employer, or their landlord.

People who have been doxxed frequently receive abusive phone calls, emails and other messages. In more serious cases, they may be fired from their jobs, evicted from their housing, subjected to criminal threats, or physically attacked.

Many doxxing incidents are motivated by, or involve expressions of, bigotry and hate. For example, in recent years Massachusetts residents have been doxxed because they have advocated for, or provided services to, marginalized groups such as migrants and transgender youth. In other situations, victims of doxxing have been subjected to threats or harassment on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, LGBTQ+ status, or immigration status.



Is doxxing illegal?

It depends. Collecting publicly available information about a person and publishing it on the internet is not, in and of itself, unlawful. Particularly where the information involved relates to a matter of legitimate public concern, this activity is likely protected as a form of speech under the First Amendment and Article 16 of the Declaration of Rights.

However, many doxxing incidents involve (or result in) actions that cross the line from protected speech into unprotected and unlawful, or even criminal, conduct. For example, a doxxing incident may utilize unlawfully obtained private information; include false and defamatory material; serve no purpose other than to harass and intimidate the victim; solicit or incite others to engage in unlawful conduct; or involve threats of violence (made either by the individual carrying out the doxxing or third parties acting in response). These types of activities may violate civil or criminal laws, including:

- Unauthorized Access to Computer Systems (“Anti-Hacking Law”) (M.G.L. c. 266, 33A)
- Invasion of Privacy (M.G.L. c. 214, § 1B)
- Civil Rights Act (M.G.L. c. 12, § 11H)
- Annoying Telephone Calls or Electronic Communications (M.G.L. c. 269, § 14A)
- Civil Harassment (M.G.L. c. 258E, § 3)
- Criminal Harassment (M.G.L. c. 265, § 43A)
- Threats to Commit a Crime (M.G.L. c. 275, § 2)
- Solicitation of Criminal Activity (M.G.L. c. 274, § 8)
- Terroristic Threats (M.G.L. c. 269, § 14)

What do I do if I’m doxxed?

If you are a victim of doxxing, you should consider taking the following steps:

- Document what is happening: Save abusive voicemails, emails, and texts, and take screenshots of activity on social media.
- Request removal of false, abusive or threatening content: Contact the platform or website involved in the doxxing incident and request that the company remove material that violates its terms of service.
- Report the incident: Contact local law enforcement about any potentially criminal conduct. You may also report doxxing incidents to the Office of the Attorney General by calling the anti-hate hotline at 1-800-994-3228.
- Learn about your rights: Consult with an attorney or legal services organization about potential civil causes of action.

