

# Boston

The complete survey — every finding, with quoted text, legal analysis, and citations

As of Jul 18, 2026

Research completed Jul 18, 2026

Confidence: medium



- This city is **moderately regulated** — sidewalk demonstration is lawful, but permit, noise, or buffer-zone rules apply.

|                        |                                                                 |                            |               |                       |                |                      |              |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------|
| RECORDING CONSENT      | All-party                                                       | ✓ OPEN RECORDING IN PUBLIC | Lawful        | ✓ RECORD POLICE       | Recognized     | AMPLIFICATION PERMIT | Conditional  |
| DAYTIME NOISE LIMIT    | 70 dBA, or plainly audible at 300 ft (100 ft for amplification) | QUIET HOURS                | 11pm-7am      | ✓ HANDHELD SIGN RULES | None           |                      |              |
| HEALTHCARE BUFFER ZONE | State                                                           | RESIDENTIAL PICKETING      | Targeted only | SIDEWALK PERMIT       | Never required | ✓ LEAFLETING         | Unrestricted |
| ✓ ANTI-MASK LAW        | None                                                            | ✓ STOP-AND-IDENTIFY        | No            | PENDING CHANGE        | See below      |                      |              |

## § Jurisdiction overview

### OVERVIEW

**Moderate rules; strong sidewalk speech rights.** A person may generally carry signs, leaflet, speak, and record openly on a Boston public sidewalk without a permit. Do not block required passage, attach materials to public property, use loud amplification in a public way or public place, or engage in nighttime targeted residential picketing. State criminal laws create the principal exposure for repeated harassment, disorderly conduct, trespass, or refusal to disperse from a qualifying unlawful assembly.

*“It shall be unlawful ... to operate a loud amplification device ... in a public way or ... public place.”*

**Legal analysis.** Boston Municipal Code chapter XVI supplies the principal local rules. Massachusetts statutes govern wiretapping, harassment, disorderly conduct, health-facility access, and disguise-related intent. The First Circuit recognizes a First Amendment right to record police in public, subject to noninterference and lawful time-place-manner restrictions.

**Editor’s note.** The municipal-code platform identifies its version as 2026 S-2; verify later City enactments before an event.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.8

## § Which law governs here

### THE CITY / COUNTY / STATE HIERARCHY

**City and state law govern; no county ordinance layer.** The relevant legal layers are Boston ordinances, Massachusetts statutes, and federal and state constitutional law. Suffolk County is not an additional ordinance layer for a Boston sidewalk demonstration. County institutions and special statutes may still exist, but the current code states that no county ordinances apply.

*“No ordinances apply. See special statutes.”*

**Legal analysis.** Boston acts under home-rule authority subject to state-law constraints. The live municipal code’s Suffolk County chapter says, twice, “No ordinances apply. See special statutes,” so there is no county code to apply to sidewalk advocacy in Boston.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code §§ 22-1, 22-2

### COUNTY LAW: SUFFOLK COUNTY

**No Suffolk County ordinances apply.** There is no operative Suffolk County ordinance layer for a person demonstrating in Boston. Consult Boston and Massachusetts law instead.

*“No ordinances apply. See special statutes.”*

**Legal analysis.** Chapter XXII of the current Boston code expressly provides that no ordinances apply for both the Suffolk County Courthouse Commission and Suffolk County.

**Editor’s note.** This does not eliminate state laws or special statutes applicable in Suffolk County.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code §§ 22-1, 22-2

## THE FIRST AMENDMENT BASELINE

**First Circuit protects public police recording.** Speech on public sidewalks and parks receives especially strong First Amendment protection. Police may apply lawful, content-neutral rules about safety, access, and sound, but cannot stop a person merely for peacefully recording officers in public. Recording cannot physically interfere with officers' work.

*“a citizen's right to film government officials ... in a public space is ... safeguarded by the First Amendment.”*

**Legal analysis.** Glik holds that peaceful filming of police in a public space is protected First Amendment activity. Project Veritas holds that Massachusetts may not apply its secret-recording prohibition to secret, nonconsensual audio recording of police performing official duties in public spaces.

**Editor's note.** The Project Veritas holding is specific to secret audio recording of police performing official duties in public.

Verified at source · high confidence · Glik v. Cunniffe, 655 F.3d 78 (1st Cir. 2011) · Project Veritas Action Fund v. Rollins, 982 F.3d 813 (1st Cir. 2020)

## § Signage

## HANDHELD SIGNS

**Handheld signs generally unrestricted.** A person may generally carry a handheld sign on a Boston public sidewalk without a permit. Do not attach the sign to public property or leave it there unattended. General obstruction and safety rules still apply.

**Legal analysis.** The current code's sign provisions concern signs erected, maintained, or left on property; the posted-materials rule prohibits affixing notices to public property without mayoral consent. No current city provision was verified imposing a handheld-sign size, number, or material restriction.

**Editor's note.** The absence of a handheld-sign rule does not authorize blocking passage or carrying an item used as a weapon.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-23.3

## STICKS, POLES &amp; SIGN MATERIALS

**No codified sign-pole rule verified.** No specific municipal material or thickness rule for sign supports was verified. Police may enforce generally applicable weapon and safety laws if an item is used or carried as a weapon.

**Legal analysis.** The current chapter XVI provisions opened in this review do not contain a demonstration-specific pole-material rule. This conclusion does not limit state dangerous-weapon laws or lawful event-security conditions.

**Editor's note.** Check event-specific permit conditions and police safety perimeters before bringing poles to a large event.

Verify before publication · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code chapter XVI

## STATIONARY &amp; ATTACHED DISPLAYS

**Affixing public-property signs needs consent.** Do not tape, staple, paint, or otherwise attach a sign to a city sidewalk, tree, lamp-post, hydrant, fence, or city building without consent. The rule also reaches materials placed on a curbstone or in a public place. Hold the sign or keep it with you instead.

*“No person shall, without the consent of the Mayor, post up, or affix ... a notice ... upon ... public property.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-23.3 is a manner-of-posting rule that applies to notices, advertisements, and bills placed on enumerated city property. It does not itself regulate the message on a handheld sign.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-23.3

## GRAPHIC IMAGERY

**Graphic-image rule unclear.** No verified Boston rule specifically bans disturbing political images on sidewalk signs. The code does contain an older obscenity provision addressing specified patently offensive sexual material. Whether that provision could constitutionally reach a particular display depends on the facts and constitutional obscenity standards.

*“Patently offensive representations ... of ultimate sexual acts ... or ... lewd exhibition of the genitals.”*

**Legal analysis.** The current code's obscenity provision concerns distribution, exhibition, printing, or publication for selling or distributing material depicting listed sexual content. It is not a verified graphic-political-image restriction, so the scope of any application to advocacy signs remains unclear.

**Editor's note.** No Boston-specific enforcement history concerning political graphic signs was verified.

Verified at source · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-25.1

## § Sound & amplification

### AMPLIFIED SOUND

**Loud amplification banned in public places.** A megaphone, loudspeaker, or other amplifier operated so as to create unreasonable or excessive noise is barred in public ways and other public places. In parks, amplification independently requires a permit from the Mayor. The noise chapter exempts a person with a valid city permit only to the extent the permit allows.

*“It shall be unlawful ... to operate a loud amplification device ... in a public way or ... public place.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-26.8 imposes a location-wide prohibition on a defined “loud amplification device or similar equipment” in public ways and places. Section 16-26.13(C) creates a permit-based exemption. Section 16-19.2 separately requires a Mayor's permit for amplification in public grounds.

**Editor's note.** The city permit system must be administered consistently with First Amendment limits on prior restraints.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.8 · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.13(C) · Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.2

### NOISE LIMITS

**dB(A) limits plus audible-distance standard.** Boston defines unreasonable or excessive noise as more than 50 dBA from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. or more than 70 dBA at other times. The code defines dBA as A-weighted sound measured with a specified sound-level meter. It also uses a plainly-audible standard: 300 feet generally and 100 feet for loud amplification devices when no applicable Air Pollution Control Commission standard applies.

*“Noise measured in excess of 50 dBA ... or in excess of 70 dBA ...; or ... plainly audible at ... 300 feet.”*

**Legal analysis.** The operative definition in § 16-26.1(B) is conjunctive in structure: numerical limits and a fallback audible-distance standard. The chapter expressly uses A-weighting, not C-weighting. Its exemptions are law-enforcement motor vehicles, emergency-vehicle noise during an actual emergency, and permitted noise; no speech- or religious-exercise carve-out appears in § 16-26.13.

**Editor's note.** The fallback audible-distance rule is textually conditioned on the absence of an applicable Air Pollution Control Commission standard.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.1(B) · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.13

### UNAMPLIFIED VOICE

**Unamplified voice may trigger general noise rules.** Unamplified speech is not exempt from the general noise definition. A large or loud group may be cited if its noise exceeds the applicable dBA limit or, where the fallback applies, is plainly audible at 300 feet. In a residential area, the disturbing-the-peace section specifically includes excessive outcries and loud singing.

*“No person shall make ... any unreasonable or excessive noise ... by whatever means ... or from whatever source.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-26.1 applies to noise “by whatever means.” Section 16-26.6(A) separately addresses unreasonable or excessive residential noise and lists excessive outcries, loud singing, and amplification. Section 16-26.6(B) directs police responding to a complaint to verify the specified limit with a sound meter before pursuing a Chapter 272, § 53 complaint.

**Editor's note.** Constitutional protection for speech does not create an exemption from content-neutral volume restrictions.

Verified at source · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code §§ 16-26.1(A), 16-26.6

### SENSITIVE LOCATIONS

**No separate hospital or school noise limit verified.** The city noise chapter does not contain a hospital, school, church, or courthouse decibel rule. The same city standards generally apply. A reproductive health care facility has separate state access and withdrawal-order protections, but those are not ordinary noise limits.

**Legal analysis.** The opened municipal noise provisions define citywide and residential-area rules, without special sound limits for hospitals, schools, houses of worship, or courthouses. G.L. c. 266, § 120E1/2 governs access impediment and conditional withdrawal orders at reproductive health care facilities.

**Editor's note.** Facility-specific court orders or property rules may create additional restrictions not identified here.

Verified at source · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.1

## § Recording & photography

### THE STATE CONSENT LAW

**All-party rule for secret audio recording.** Massachusetts generally requires prior authority from all parties for secret audio recording. Open recording is not a secret interception under the statute. The First Circuit held that the statute cannot constitutionally be applied to secret, nonconsensual audio recording of police officers performing official duties in public spaces.

*““interception” means to secretly hear, secretly record ... without prior authority by all parties to such communication.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 99(B)(4) defines interception as secretly hearing or recording a wire or oral communication without prior authority from all parties. The First Circuit explained that Massachusetts does not create a general expectation-of-privacy exception, but Project Veritas affirmed relief for secret recording of police discharging official duties in public.

**Conflicting authority.** The Massachusetts statute is broad, but Project Veritas bars its application to secret public recording of police performing official duties.

**Editor’s note.** The Project Veritas holding does not invalidate § 99 for private conversations or all other public recording scenarios.

Verified at source · high confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 272, § 99(B)(4) · Project Veritas Action Fund v. Rollins, 982 F.3d 813 (1st Cir. 2020)

### RECORDING PEOPLE IN PUBLIC

**Open public recording lawful.** You may openly photograph and video-record people in public places, including at a demonstration. The wiretap statute is directed at secret audio interception, not ordinary visible photography or video. Repeated conduct directed at a particular person that seriously alarms them can become criminal harassment.

*“Whoever willfully and maliciously engages in a knowing pattern of conduct ... directed at a specific person ...”*

**Legal analysis.** Open visual recording does not fit § 99’s definition of a secret interception. Criminal harassment requires willful and malicious conduct, a knowing pattern or series of acts over time, direction at a specific person, serious alarm, and objectively reasonable substantial emotional distress.

**Editor’s note.** Audio recording presents additional § 99 issues if it is secret and outside the public-police-recording rule.

Verified at source · high confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A(a) · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 272, § 99(B)(4)

### RECORDING POLICE

**Police-recording right recognized.** You may record Boston police officers performing their duties in public. Keep sufficient distance and do not physically interfere with police activity. A police order directed solely at suppressing peaceful recording is constitutionally suspect.

*“The filming of government officials engaged in their duties in a public place ... fits comfortably within these principles.”*

**Legal analysis.** Glik held that filming police in a public space is protected First Amendment activity; its facts involved recording from roughly ten feet away on Boston Common. Project Veritas held § 99 unconstitutional as applied to secret, nonconsensual audio recording of police performing official duties in public spaces.

**Editor’s note.** The right does not authorize obstruction, trespass, or violation of a lawful safety perimeter.

Verified at source · high confidence · Glik v. Cunniffe, 655 F.3d 78 (1st Cir. 2011) · Project Veritas Action Fund v. Rollins, 982 F.3d 813 (1st Cir. 2020)

### PUBLISHING FOOTAGE

**Public-footage publication generally protected.** Publishing ordinary footage of a public demonstration is generally protected. Do not assume that protection covers intimate visual material, false statements, or unlawfully obtained recordings. Massachusetts criminal-harassment law separately addresses harmful distribution of identifiable nude, partially nude, or sexual material.

*“This subsection shall not apply to ... material ... in a place where a person does not have a reasonable expectation of privacy.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 43A(b) specifically regulates intentional or reckless harmful distribution of defined intimate visual material, while excluding some material occurring where there is no reasonable expectation of privacy and matters of public concern. Public demonstration footage ordinarily is outside that specific intimate-material offense.

**Editor’s note.** This finding does not resolve defamation, copyright, commercial-appropriation, or a particular privacy-tort claim.

Verified at source · medium confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A(b)(6)

### DRONES

**FAA rules primarily govern drones.** Do not assume a drone may fly over a crowd merely because the demonstration is in public. FAA rules, controlled airspace, and park or property restrictions apply. No Boston-specific drone ordinance was verified in this adjudication.



**Legal analysis.** This limited adjudication did not re-verify the full FAA regime or all park rules. The city chapter XVI material opened here contains no drone-specific provision.

**Editor’s note.** Check current FAA airspace and operational rules before each flight.

Verify before publication · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code chapter XVI

## § Assembly & permits

### WHEN A PERMIT IS REQUIRED

**Park demonstrations need permits; sidewalk threshold absent.** A demonstration on park land requires a Parks and Recreation permit when it has the effect, intent, or propensity to attract a substantial crowd. The code does not set a number of participants. No current code provision was verified requiring a permit solely because people are standing together on a public sidewalk.

*“No person ... shall hold or sponsor a demonstration ... upon park land unless a permit ... has first been obtained.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-19.3(A) applies to park land, not ordinary sidewalks, and defines demonstration by communicative activity plus an actual or intended substantial-crowd feature. It excludes casual park-land use without intent and propensity to attract a substantial crowd.

**Editor’s note.** Street closures, parades, park use, structures, and amplification can independently require permissions.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.3(A)

### FEES, INSURANCE & INDEMNIFICATION

**Park cleanup bond required.** A park demonstration permit requires a bond or cash deposit to cover restoration, rehabilitation, and cleanup. The code says unused funds must be returned. This section does not state a fixed dollar amount.

*“the Commissioner shall require ... a bond ... sufficient ... to cover costs of restoration, rehabilitation and cleanup.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-19.3(B) conditions permit issuance on a bond with satisfactory surety or an equivalent cash deposit. The amount is determined by the Commissioner and tied to cleanup costs. Constitutional limits constrain discretionary speech-related fees.

**Editor’s note.** No current administrative event-insurance schedule was verified in this adjudication.

Verified at source · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.3(B)

### SPONTANEOUS & SMALL GROUPS

**Small or casual park use excluded.** A small group may generally demonstrate on a public sidewalk without a permit if it does not need a street closure, park permit, structure, or amplification authorization. The park ordinance also excludes casual park use that lacks intent and propensity to attract a substantial crowd. A spontaneous event can still require compliance with access, noise, and safety rules.

*“The term DEMONSTRATION shall not include casual park land use ... [without] intent and propensity to attract a substantial crowd.”*

**Legal analysis.** The statutory exclusion is not a categorical spontaneous-assembly clause, but it excludes casual park use lacking the specified crowd-related characteristics. Because no stationary-sidewalk headcount trigger was verified, the summary field records a small/spontaneous exception as applicable.

**Editor’s note.** The city has not defined “substantial crowd” numerically in this provision.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.3(A)

### DENIAL & APPEAL

**Park Commissioner may set time, place, manner.** The park ordinance directs the Commissioner to honor permit requests. The Commissioner may specify time, place, and manner to address competing uses and public safety. The ordinance text opened in this review does not provide a separate administrative appeal process.

*“The Commissioner shall honor all requests ... except ... [may] specify the time, place and manner.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-19.3(A) provides a mandatory-issuance formulation coupled with defined authority to set conditions. Any restriction remains subject to constitutional review of prior restraints and time-place-manner conditions.

**Editor’s note.** Seek written conditions and legal advice promptly if an event date makes judicial review necessary.

Verified at source · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.3(A)

## § Location rules

### SIDEWALKS & STREETS

**Obstruction rule applies in market limits.** Do not block pedestrian passage. In designated market limits, the city expressly requires a clear and direct passage for travelers on the sidewalk. This review did not verify a citywide numerical clearance measurement.

*“No person shall, within any market limits, so occupy or obstruct any sidewalk as not to leave a clear and direct passage.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-10.2 is a municipal sidewalk-obstruction ordinance limited by its text to market limits. It supports a “true” summary value because it criminalizes obstructing a sidewalk without clear passage, but it does not establish a citywide four-foot rule.

**Editor’s note.** Additional state offenses can apply to obstruction, trespass, or a facility entrance.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-10.2

### PARKS & PLAZAS

**Park demonstrations and amplification regulated.** A park demonstration meeting the code definition requires a Parks permit. Any amplification device in public grounds requires a Mayor’s permit. Do not stand or sit on protected grass, fountains, monuments, statues, or listed structures unless a stated exception applies.

*“No person shall ... use any device intended to amplify or broadcast sound ... except in accordance with a permit from the Mayor.”*

**Legal analysis.** Sections 16-19.1 through 16-19.3 regulate public grounds. The definition of demonstration has no numerical threshold, and the amplification provision applies independently of the demonstration-permit provision.

**Editor’s note.** This review did not independently verify park-hour schedules or each plaza’s forum classification.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code §§ 16-19.1 to 16-19.3

### HEALTHCARE BUFFER ZONES

**Conditional state 25-foot withdrawal order.** There is no standing fixed 25-foot zone under this law. An officer may issue a written order only after one or more individuals have substantially impeded access or departure that day. The order requires withdrawal at least 25 feet from an entrance or driveway for eight hours or until close of business, whichever is earlier; the boundary must be marked and statutory text posted.

*“A law enforcement official may order ... individuals who have on that day substantially impeded access to or departure from ... a facility.”*

**Legal analysis.** G.L. c. 266, § 120E1/2(b) is individualized and conditional. It applies during business hours and only with a clearly marked boundary and posted statute. “Impede” includes conduct rendering passage impossible, unsafe, or unreasonably difficult.

**Editor’s note.** The statute’s defined facility excludes a place within or upon hospital grounds.

Verified at source · high confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 266, § 120E1/2(b)

### RESIDENTIAL PICKETING

**Nighttime targeted residential picketing prohibited.** Do not picket, protest, or demonstrate before or about a particular targeted residence between 9:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m. The ordinance does not prohibit general neighborhood marching. During daytime, targeted activity remains subject to excessive-noise, disturbance, harassment, and street- or sidewalk-blocking laws.

*“It shall be unlawful ... to engage in targeted residential picketing between ... 9:00 p.m and 9:00 a.m.”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-64 defines targeted residential picketing as expressive activity, with or without signs, specifically directed toward one or more occupants of a particular residence and occurring before or about that residence. It imposes noncriminal fines escalating from \$50 to \$300.

**Editor’s note.** Repeated targeted conduct can also support criminal-harassment charges or civil protective orders under applicable state law.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-64 · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A(a)

### SCHOOLS & OTHER SENSITIVE SITES

**No school-specific demonstration rule verified.** General sidewalk, noise, access, and disorderly-conduct rules apply near schools and courthouses. No city school-zone demonstration or noise rule was verified. Building and court security rules may apply once a person enters controlled property.

**Legal analysis.** The opened city noise chapter establishes citywide and residential-area standards, not a school-session standard. This limited review did not establish a school- or courthouse-specific protest ordinance.

**Editor’s note.** State court and MBTA property rules are outside this limited municipal-code adjudication.

Verify before publication · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.1

## § Person-to-person contact

### LEAFLETING

**Sidewalk leafleting generally protected.** You may generally hand literature to willing people on a public sidewalk. Do not attach leaflets to public property without consent, and do not leave litter. This review did not verify a city ordinance requiring a permit for ordinary noncommercial sidewalk leafleting.

*“No person shall, without the consent of the Mayor, post up, or affix ... a notice ... upon ... public property.”*

**Legal analysis.** The current code prohibits posting or affixing notices to public property without the Mayor's consent. That differs from handing literature directly to people. The constitutional baseline strongly protects noncommercial leafleting in public forums.

**Editor's note.** Do not represent this conclusion as permission to leave materials on vehicles or property without consent.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-23.3

### APPROACHING PEOPLE

**Brief approaches generally lawful.** You may generally approach a person to speak or offer a leaflet on a public sidewalk. Let people walk away and do not block their path. Repeatedly following or targeting a person after refusal can create harassment exposure.

*“a knowing pattern of conduct or series of acts over a period of time directed at a specific person ...”*

**Legal analysis.** Criminal harassment requires a knowing pattern or series of acts over time directed to a specific person, serious alarm, and reasonable substantial emotional distress. A single brief approach ordinarily does not satisfy that text.

**Editor's note.** The health-facility withdrawal-order statute creates a distinct, conditional 25-foot restriction after substantial same-day impediment.

Verified at source · high confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A(a)

### HARASSMENT & DISORDERLY CONDUCT

**Harassment requires repeated targeted conduct.** Peaceful advocacy directed generally to the public is not criminal harassment merely because it is unwelcome. Repeated conduct aimed at a particular person that seriously alarms them can be a crime. Disorderly-conduct and public-peace charges can also arise from conduct, but their precise constitutional limits depend on the facts.

*“Whoever willfully and maliciously engages in a knowing pattern of conduct ... which seriously alarms that person ...”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 43A(a) states the criminal-harassment elements and a penalty of up to two and one-half years in a house of correction or a fine up to \$5,000. Its text covers conduct by electronic communication as well as physical acts.

**Editor's note.** The precise judicial narrowing of disorderly-conduct law was not re-verified in this adjudication.

Verified at source · high confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A(a)

### ANONYMITY & MASKS

**No general anti-mask prohibition.** Wearing a mask alone is not prohibited by this statute. The law requires intent to obstruct execution of law or to intimidate, hinder, or interrupt an officer or other person in lawful duties or exercise of rights. Boston has no verified separate demonstration mask ban.

*“Whoever disguises himself with intent to obstruct ... or to intimidate, hinder or interrupt ... shall be punished ...”*

**Legal analysis.** G.L. c. 268, § 34 is an intent-based disguise offense, not a categorical anti-mask law. It authorizes a fine up to \$500 or imprisonment up to one year.

**Editor's note.** A mask may not be used to facilitate another offense.

Verified at source · high confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 268, § 34

## § Police interaction

### IDENTIFICATION

**No general pedestrian stop-and-identify rule verified.** This review found no general Massachusetts pedestrian stop-and-identify statute. Do not provide false identifying information after arrest. Drivers have separate obligations not addressed by this finding.

*“Whoever knowingly and willfully furnishes a false name ... following an arrest shall be punished ...”*

**Legal analysis.** G.L. c. 268, § 34A addresses knowingly and willfully furnishing false identifying information to law enforcement following arrest. Its wording does not create a general pre-arrest duty to identify oneself.

**Editor's note.** Ask whether you are free to leave, but seek legal advice about a particular detention.

Verify before publication · medium confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 268, § 34A

DISPERSAL ORDERS

**Qualifying unlawful assemblies may be dispersed.** A peaceful assembly is not automatically unlawful because it is large or controversial. When officers issue a dispersal order, the factual basis and wording matter. Leaving safely and challenging an allegedly unlawful order later usually reduces immediate arrest risk.

**Legal analysis.** The state baseline identifies G.L. c. 269, §§ 1-2 as the relevant unlawful-assembly and dispersal statutes. Their precise current penalty text and judicial construction were not re-opened in this adjudication.

**Editor’s note.** The statute’s applicability to a specific order depends on the assembly, command, notice, and circumstances.

Verify before publication · medium confidence · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 269, § 1

COMMON CHARGES & OUTCOMES

**Municipal citations and state misdemeanors differ.** A city noise or residential-picketing ticket is different from a state criminal charge. Residential-picketing fines are \$50, \$150, and \$300 for escalating offenses within twelve months. Repeated targeted harassment can expose a person to state criminal punishment.

*“Any violation ... shall be punishable by a fine of \$50 ... \$150 ... and \$300 ...”*

**Legal analysis.** Section 16-64(C) expressly uses M.G.L. c. 40, § 21D noncriminal disposition. Section 43A(a) supplies the criminal-harassment penalty. Actual charges and outcomes are fact-specific and were not comprehensively audited here.

**Editor’s note.** No centralized Boston prosecution-outcomes dataset was verified in this adjudication.

Verified at source · high confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-64(C) · Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A(a)

§ Law-in-effect vs. law-on-the-books

ENFORCEMENT REALITY

**Codified rules and facts determine exposure.** The clearest codified city risks are loud amplification in public ways or places, unreasonable noise, posting materials on public property, sidewalk obstruction in market limits, and nighttime targeted residential picketing. State law adds serious consequences for health-facility access impediment and criminal harassment. This review did not verify a current BPD protest-policy manual or comprehensive enforcement database.

*“It shall be unlawful ... to operate a loud amplification device ... in a public way or ... public place.”*

**Legal analysis.** The live code confirms the substantive city restrictions, while state statutes supply the principal criminal offenses discussed here. Assertions about police practice, charging patterns, settlements, or internal orders were not re-verified and should not be treated as current operational policy.

**Editor’s note.** Do not infer a current police practice from older litigation, news accounts, or interest-group guidance not re-verified here.

Verified at source · medium confidence · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.8

☒ Penalties a demonstrator could face

| OFFENSE                                                                                                      | LEVEL            | PENALTY                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unreasonable noise / public-way loud amplification — Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.8                         | Civil infraction | First \$50; second \$100; third and later \$200 within 12 months                        |
| Targeted residential picketing — Boston Municipal Code § 16-64                                               | Civil infraction | \$50 first offense, \$150 second, \$300 third and subsequent offense within 12 months   |
| Park demonstration violation — Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.3                                               | Civil infraction | \$300 fine plus restoration, rehabilitation, cleanup, and collection costs              |
| Criminal harassment — Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A(a)                                                      | Misdemeanor      | Up to 2.5 years in a house of correction, up to \$5,000 fine, or both                   |
| Failure to comply with reproductive-health-facility withdrawal order — Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 266, § 120E1/2(c) | Misdemeanor      | First offense: up to \$500 or 3 months; later offense: \$500-\$5,000 or up to 2.5 years |
| Disguise with prohibited intent — Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 268, § 34                                              | Misdemeanor      | Up to \$500 fine or up to 1 year imprisonment                                           |



Recent changes

- Mar 2026

H.1839, concerning disorderly-person penalties; H.4684, concerning police masks or disguises; and H.1981, concerning personal protective medical equipment, each accompanied House study order H5281 and is not a pending proposal.
- Dec 2025

S.1758, proposing a ban on tear gas against civilians, accompanied study order S2798 and is not a pending proposal.
- Jul 2025

S.1427, concerning municipal bans of face coverings for protective or medical use, accompanied study order S2568 and is not a pending proposal.
- Jun 2024

H.1556 (193rd), concerning a residential protest restriction near elected officials' homes, accompanied study order H4517 and did not pass.
- Mar 2022

Boston Ordinance 2022 c. 2 enacted the current targeted-residential-picketing rule, codified at § 16-64.

Pending changes to watch

S.1204 — An Act updating the Commonwealth's wiretap statutes

State legislation · Reported favorably by the Judiciary and referred to Senate Ways and Means on 2025-10-09; still shown at that stage on the official bill page.

If enacted, the bill could amend Massachusetts wiretap law, which could affect recording rules relevant to public advocacy.

Key authorities

Boston Noise Ordinance Boston Municipal Code §§ 16-26.1, 16-26.8, 16-26.13

Defines dB(A) and audible-distance standards, bars loud amplification in public places, and identifies permit-based exemptions.

Boston Park Demonstration Permit Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.3

Requires permits for defined park demonstrations and excludes specified casual park use.

Boston Targeted Residential Picketing Ordinance Boston Municipal Code § 16-64

Prohibits targeted residential picketing from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. and creates escalating noncriminal fines.

Boston Sidewalk Obstruction Rule Boston Municipal Code § 16-10.2

Requires clear and direct pedestrian passage in market limits.

Massachusetts Wiretap Statute Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 272, § 99

Defines secret interception and establishes the Commonwealth's all-party rule.

Massachusetts Reproductive Health Facility Law Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 266, § 120E1/2

Authorizes a conditional written 25-foot withdrawal order after same-day substantial impediment.

Massachusetts Criminal Harassment Statute Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 265, § 43A

Criminalizes repeated targeted conduct causing serious alarm and substantial emotional distress.

Massachusetts Disguise Statute Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 268, § 34

Makes disguise unlawful only with specified obstructive or intimidating intent.

Glik v. Cunniffe 655 F.3d 78 (1st Cir. 2011)

Recognizes a First Amendment right to peacefully film police performing public duties.

Project Veritas Action Fund v. Rollins 982 F.3d 813 (1st Cir. 2020)

Bars application of the wiretap statute to secret audio recording of police performing official duties in public.

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## § Research notes

Overall confidence: Medium. This adjudicated survey is current through 2026-07-18. The Massachusetts 194th General Court remains in session through its scheduled formal-session and final-session dates, so S.1204 may change. Verify current City enactments, event-specific permit requirements, court orders, and public-safety conditions before demonstrating. This is legal information, not legal advice.

**Unresolved points.** No official City enactment record was opened to independently confirm whether amendments postdating the 2026 S-2 hosted code changed any relevant text. — No current Boston administrative outdoor-event permit procedures, fee schedules, or insurance rules were independently verified. — No comprehensive current BPD protest-policy manual, arrest database, or prosecution-outcomes database was reviewed. — No exhaustive current-biennium legislative database search was technically available through the legislature search interface; the identified bill pages were verified individually. — The scope of any Boston obscenity provision as applied to political graphic imagery remains unresolved.

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Generated from the structured demonstration-law deep-research record for Boston, Massachusetts (research completed 2026-07-18). Findings marked “verify before publication” have not yet been confirmed by an editor at the cited source. This document has not been reviewed by a lawyer and should not be used as legal advice.