

DEMONSTRATION-LAW SNAPSHOT

Boston

Signage, sound, recording, permits, and police interaction — one-page field reference

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

Peaceful sidewalk advocacy generally needs no permit, but Boston regulates amplification, noise, obstruction, and nighttime targeted residential picketing.

Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.8

● Sound & noise

AMPLIFIED SOUND

Boston prohibits operating a loud amplification device in any public way or public place, but a valid city permit can exempt noise to its stated extent.

Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.8 · Boston Municipal Code § 16-26.13(C) · Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.2

NOISE LIMITS

Boston uses A-weighted decibel limits and, absent an applicable external standard, a 300-foot plainly-audible rule reduced to 100 feet for loud amplification.

HEALTHCARE BUFFER ZONES

Massachusetts authorizes a written 25-foot withdrawal order after same-day substantial impediment of access to a reproductive health care facility.

RESIDENTIAL PICKETING

Boston prohibits picketing specifically directed at occupants of a particular residence from 9:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m.; daytime conduct remains subject to other laws.

RECORDING IN PUBLIC

Massachusetts criminalizes secret interception of wire or oral communications without prior authority from all parties, while Project Veritas protects secret public recording of police performing duties.

RECORDING POLICE

The First Circuit recognizes a First Amendment right to record police performing public duties, including secret audio recording in public under Project Veritas.

§ Permits & small groups

WITHOUT A PERMIT

The park permit definition excludes casual park use lacking intent and propensity to attract a substantial crowd; no sidewalk permit threshold was verified.

Boston Municipal Code § 16-19.3(A)

WHEN A PERMIT IS REQUIRED

Boston requires a permit for a defined demonstration on park land, but no numerical permit threshold for a stationary sidewalk assembly was verified.

☒ Penalties in effect

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

OFFENSE	LEVEL	PENALTY
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

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.

Generated from the structured demonstration-law deep-research record for Boston, Massachusetts (research completed 2026-07-18). This snapshot condenses a much larger sourced dataset — full citations, quoted ordinance text, and plain-language explanations are in the full Boston survey and the full reference PDF. This document has not been reviewed by a lawyer and should not be used as legal advice.