Reporting suspected Bank Secrecy Act (BSA) problems can feel risky, especially if your job, income, or professional reputation may be affected. If your employer fires, demotes, threatens, or otherwise punishes you for protected whistleblowing, you may have legal options. Depending on the facts and the law that applies, possible remedies can include reinstatement, back pay, and attorney's fees.

But not every workplace dispute involving a compliance concern is automatically unlawful retaliation. The report, the employer's response, the connection between them, and the legal route you use all matter. This guide explains the main BSA duties, what may qualify as reportable conduct, and what recovery could look like. It is general information, not legal advice for your situation.

Start with the BSA issue—and the retaliation

The BSA and related rules require certain financial institutions to maintain safeguards against money laundering and other financial crime. Those responsibilities can involve reporting suspicious activity, tracking cash transactions, identifying customers, and maintaining an effective anti-money-laundering (AML) program. A mistake or disagreement about how to apply a rule is not necessarily a violation. A concern becomes more substantial when facts suggest a legal duty was knowingly ignored, bypassed, or inadequately performed.

Separately, retaliation generally means an adverse action taken because someone engaged in legally protected activity. Examples may include termination, demotion, a pay cut, threats, harassment, or exclusion from work opportunities. A difficult manager or an unfavorable performance review is not automatically retaliation; the timing, stated reasons, documents, and treatment of comparable employees can all be relevant.

Which BSA duties might be involved?

BSA/AML area What the duty generally involves Examples of concerns to document Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) Filing reports when applicable legal and regulatory standards are met, and maintaining required confidentiality. Alleged suppression of qualifying alerts, repeated failures to escalate, or pressure to disclose a SAR or its existence improperly. Currency Transaction Reports (CTRs) Reporting covered cash transactions as required, including applying aggregation rules where relevant. Instructions to split transactions or avoid reporting that appears designed to evade a reporting duty. Customer Due Diligence (CDD) Understanding customer relationships and risk, including identifying beneficial owners when required. Knowingly incomplete customer information, ignored risk indicators, or procedures that are not followed. AML program effectiveness Maintaining an appropriately designed, risk-based program, which may include internal controls, testing, training, and a designated compliance officer. Repeated control failures, inadequate staffing or escalation processes, or management interference with compliance work.

These examples are not proof of a violation by themselves. For instance, a SAR filing decision can involve judgment, and not every suspicious transaction meets the applicable reporting threshold. The key questions are what the rules required, what the institution knew, and what it did in response.



What may qualify as a reportable BSA/AML violation?

A reportable concern may involve a possible violation of the BSA or its implementing regulations, or conduct connected to money laundering or other covered financial crimes. Examples could include knowingly failing to make required reports, maintaining controls that are seriously deficient, obstructing an investigation, or directing staff to conceal relevant information. The legal analysis depends on the specific institution, transaction, duty, evidence, and circumstances.

Try to describe observable facts rather than conclusions. Instead of writing “everyone knows the bank is laundering money,” identify what you personally saw: the date, the control or procedure involved, the instruction given, the people present, and the records that may support your concern. “Everyone knows” is not evidence; a careful timeline and specific details are much more useful.

What remedies might be available for retaliation?

Federal BSA whistleblower protections may apply to certain individuals who provide information to the U.S. Department of the Treasury or the U.S. Department of Justice about possible BSA violations, or who participate in covered proceedings. The statute’s protections and procedures are specific, and an internal report alone may not satisfy every requirement for a federal retaliation claim. Other laws, including state or industry-specific protections, may also matter.

Depending on the claim and the facts, a successful retaliation case may allow some of the following:

- **Reinstatement:** Returning to your former job or, where appropriate, an equivalent position.
- **Back pay:** Lost wages and certain employment benefits, potentially with interest, for the period affected by retaliation.
- **Compensatory damages:** In some circumstances, damages for losses or harm caused by retaliation. What is available depends on the governing law and evidence.
- **Attorney’s fees and costs:** A court may award reasonable legal fees and litigation costs where the applicable law allows it.
- **Other relief:** A court may order appropriate measures to address the retaliation, depending on the statute and case.

These remedies are not automatic. You generally need to establish that you engaged in protected activity, suffered an adverse action, and that the protected activity was connected to the action. The employer may offer a different explanation, such as a documented performance or restructuring reason. Evidence and legal deadlines can be decisive. Do not assume that reinstatement or a particular amount of back pay is guaranteed.

Retaliation recovery is different from a whistleblower award

Some BSA whistleblowers may also be eligible to seek an award for original information that leads to qualifying enforcement action. That is a separate process from recovering losses caused by employer retaliation. A retaliation claim addresses workplace harm; an award program concerns qualifying information that helps the government achieve a successful enforcement result.

Eligibility for an award is not automatic. Generally, the information must be original and sufficiently useful to lead to a successful action meeting the program's requirements. "Original information" can have a technical meaning. Information already known to the government, publicly available information, or information obtained through certain restricted channels may not qualify. There are also rules about who can submit, what information is eligible, and how the award is determined.

The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN), a bureau within the U.S. Department of the Treasury, administers the BSA whistleblower award process. The FinCEN whistleblower submission form is an agency process for providing information; submitting it is not, by itself, a promise of an award or a substitute for evaluating a retaliation claim. The agency's current instructions and eligibility rules should be reviewed before filing.



Internal reporting and external reporting

Internal compliance channels can be an important way to raise a concern. Depending on your workplace, those channels may include a manager, compliance officer, ethics hotline, or board-level contact. Keep a record of when and how you reported, what you said, and any response. However, internal reporting does not necessarily satisfy every requirement for federal whistleblower protection or an award. If you are considering an external report, learn the applicable rules before sharing sensitive information.

Do not take or send documents you are not authorized to access, and do not email confidential work materials to a personal account. BSA records can include customer information and SAR-related material subject to strict confidentiality requirements. An attorney can help assess how to preserve relevant evidence lawfully without exposing protected information.

Practical steps if you believe retaliation is happening

1. **Write a timeline the same day something happens.** Record the date, time, people involved, exact words where possible, and what changed afterward. Add earlier events while your memory is fresh.
2. **Keep relevant employment records lawfully.** Save documents you are entitled to possess, such as your offer letter, performance reviews, pay records, and communications sent to you. Do not download or forward restricted customer, SAR, or bank records.
3. **Separate facts from conclusions.** Note what you directly observed, what someone told you, and what you infer. Identify the source for each point.
4. **Track deadlines promptly.** Different claims have different filing rules. Federal BSA retaliation provisions include a limitations period, and other legal routes may have separate deadlines or steps. A lawyer can help identify which applies.
5. **Get advice before making a major move.** Before resigning, signing a severance agreement, or sending sensitive material outside the institution, consider speaking with a lawyer familiar with whistleblower and financial-regulatory matters.

Working with a whistleblower attorney—and contingency fees

A whistleblower attorney original information whistleblower can help assess whether the facts fit a protected reporting activity, identify the right agency or court process, evaluate deadlines, and separate a potential award submission from a retaliation claim. Ask about the lawyer's experience with BSA matters, confidentiality protections, conflicts of interest, and how communications will be handled.

Some lawyers may accept qualifying cases on a contingency-fee basis, meaning the fee is tied to a recovery rather than billed entirely by the hour. Terms differ. Ask what percentage applies, whether costs are separate, what happens if there is no recovery, and whether you could owe expenses. A contingency arrangement does not mean the case is risk-free, and attorney's fees awarded by a court are not the same thing as a lawyer's private fee agreement.

USAttorneys.com may be one place to begin looking for legal information or counsel, but check any attorney's credentials and experience independently. No directory or consultation can guarantee that a claim will succeed.

The bottom line

If your employer retaliates after you report BSA issues, possible remedies may include reinstatement, back pay, and attorney's fees, along with other relief allowed by the applicable law. Your options depend on what you reported, how you reported it, what your employer did, and whether you meet the relevant legal requirements. Write down a timeline the same day events occur, protect confidential information, and get advice before taking steps that could affect your rights or the privacy of customers.