

# SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL  
Los Angeles, CA

## Disability Accommodation Policy for Employees and Job Applicants

**Administrative policy approved May 31, 2023. Effective immediately.**

**Revision history:** Supersedes and replaces the Disability and Accommodations Policy in Appendix L of the Employee Handbook; edits made August 2025; edits made March 2026 regarding related policy.

**Related policies:** Faculty Disability Leave Policy

**Related forms:** Request for Reasonable Accommodations (Employee) Confidential; Confidential Healthcare Provider Questionnaire (Employee)

**Scheduled Review Date:** May 2027 (General Counsel's Office and Administrative Services Office)

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## **A. Purpose and Objective**

Southwestern Law School is committed to fostering an inclusive workplace in which individuals with disabilities are full participants and providing equal employment opportunities to qualified individuals with disabilities.

Southwestern complies with all applicable laws protecting qualified individuals with disabilities, including but not limited to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended (ADA), the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), and comparable disability nondiscrimination laws in other jurisdictions where Southwestern employs personnel. Under these laws, Southwestern will provide reasonable accommodations to qualified employees and applicants with physical or mental disabilities to enable them to perform the essential functions of their positions, unless doing so would create an undue hardship for the law school or pose a direct threat to the health or safety of the individual or others in the workplace.

## **B. Eligibility**

This policy applies to all employees and job applicants and extends to all aspects of Southwestern's employment practices, including recruiting, hiring, discipline, termination, promotions, transfers, compensation, benefits, training, leaves of absence, and other terms and conditions of employment.

## **C. Section 504 Coordinator**

Southwestern's Director of Administrative Services ([hr@swlaw.edu](mailto:hr@swlaw.edu)) serves as its Section 504 Coordinator under this policy. The Section 504 Coordinator is responsible for overseeing Southwestern's compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, including coordinating the institution's efforts to ensure nondiscrimination and to address grievances related to disability accommodations for employees and applicants.

This policy applies to employees and job applicants. Southwestern has a separate Section 504 Coordinator for student disability matters; students seeking accommodations should contact the Associate Director of Student Affairs/Section 504 Coordinator ([accessibility@swlaw.edu](mailto:accessibility@swlaw.edu)).

## **D. Definitions**

FEHA defines two categories of disability: mental disability and physical disability. In addition, employees or applicants with a medical condition are also entitled to reasonable accommodation under FEHA.

## **1. Disability**

Disability includes a physical or mental impairment or medical condition that limits one or more major life activities, having a record or history of such impairment, or being perceived or regarded as having such impairment. Major life activities include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, sitting, standing, lifting, reaching, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, and working. This definition is provided only as a guide. Nothing in this policy is intended to alter the legal definitions of this term or impose obligations on Southwestern not required by law.

## **2. Physical disability**

Physical disabilities include any physiological disease, disorder, condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss that affects one or more of several body systems and limits a major life activity. The body systems listed include the neurological, immunological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin, and endocrine systems. A physiological disease, disorder, condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss limits a major life activity, such as working, if it makes it difficult to achieve the major life activity. Physical disability also includes any other health impairment that requires special education or related services; having a record or history of a disease, disorder, condition, cosmetic disfigurement, anatomical loss, or health impairment known to Southwestern; and being perceived or treated by Southwestern as having any of the conditions mentioned above.

## **3. Mental disability**

Mental disabilities include any mental or psychological disorder or condition, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, or specific learning disabilities, that limits a major life activity or any other mental or psychological disorder or condition that requires special education or related services. An employee with a record or history of a mental or psychological disorder or condition known to Southwestern, or who is regarded or treated by Southwestern as having a mental disorder or condition, is also protected.

## **4. Medical condition**

A medical condition is any health impairment related to or associated with a diagnosis of cancer or a record or history of cancer, or a genetic characteristic. A genetic characteristic can be a scientifically or medically

identifiable gene or chromosome or an inherited characteristic that could statistically lead to the increased development of a disease or disorder. For example, women who carry a gene established to statistically lead to breast cancer are protected under California law. Southwestern will not subject, directly or indirectly, any employee or applicant to a test for the presence of a genetic characteristic.

## **E. Procedures**

### **1. Request for disability accommodation**

If an employee or applicant believes they need an accommodation because of a disability, they are encouraged to request a reasonable accommodation from Human Resources. This request can be made orally or in writing. Southwestern recognizes its obligation to engage in the interactive process and will do so when it becomes aware, through observation or other means, that an employee or applicant may need a reasonable accommodation due to a disability, even if no accommodation has been requested.

Southwestern encourages employees and applicants to make their request in writing by completing and submitting a [Request for Reasonable Accommodations \(Employee\)](#) and the associated [Confidential Healthcare Provider Questionnaire \(Employee\)](#) to Human Resources via email to [hr@swlaw.edu](mailto:hr@swlaw.edu). An employee or applicant requesting an accommodation should include in the request their suggestion for specific reasonable accommodations and how the employee or applicant or their treating healthcare provider believes that the accommodation(s) will help the employee or applicant perform the essential functions of the job. Job applicants should make these requests as soon as reasonably possible during the application and recruitment process.

### **2. Alternate formats**

Southwestern will provide this policy and any associated forms or materials in alternate formats to individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities that affect their ability to access standard print or electronic materials. Individuals who need the policy or forms in an alternate format should contact Human Resources via email at [hr@swlaw.edu](mailto:hr@swlaw.edu) or the Section 504 Coordinator at [accessibility@swlaw.edu](mailto:accessibility@swlaw.edu) to request an accessible version.

### **3. Medical information**

If an individual's disability or need for accommodation is not obvious, Southwestern may ask the individual to provide supporting documents showing that the individual has a disability within the meaning of the ADA and FEHA and that the disability necessitates a reasonable accommodation for the individual to perform the essential functions of the position. This documentation will not include submitting a diagnosis or medical condition. If the information provided in response to this request is insufficient, Southwestern may require that the individual see a healthcare professional of Southwestern's choosing and at Southwestern's expense. In those cases, if the individual fails to provide the requested information or see the designated healthcare professional, the request for a reasonable accommodation may be denied.

Southwestern will keep confidential any medical information it obtains in connection with a request for reasonable accommodation. Southwestern will share medical information only with those who need to know to evaluate the request or implement the accommodation. For example, a supervisor may be informed about necessary work restrictions or accommodations, but will not be provided with the employee's medical diagnosis or other detailed medical information.

### **4. Interactive process**

After receiving an oral or written disability accommodation request, Southwestern will engage in an interactive process with the individual to determine their specific limitations with respect to the essential functions of their job and explore potential reasonable accommodations that could overcome those limitations. Both Southwestern and the employee or applicant are expected to participate in the interactive process in good faith. Southwestern encourages the requesting individual to suggest specific reasonable accommodations that they believe would allow the requesting individual to perform the essential functions of their job. However, Southwestern is not required to make the specific accommodation requested and may provide an alternative, effective accommodation, to the extent any reasonable accommodation can be made without imposing an undue hardship on Southwestern.

In determining how to respond to a disability accommodation request, Human Resources will:

- identify the essential functions of the individual's position;

- confer with anyone reasonably necessary to the decision-making process, including the employee's immediate supervisor;
- assess the impact of the requested accommodation on the performance of the essential functions of the individual's position and the operation of the department; and
- assess all other potential issues posed by the request, such as the impact on other employees.

## **5. Determinations**

Southwestern makes determinations about reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis considering various factors and based on an individualized assessment in each situation, having engaged in the interactive process. It is important to note that accommodations are based on the unique needs of the employee or applicant's limitations and the necessity to perform the essential functions of the job and not necessarily on the employee's or applicant's preferences. On the other hand, if reasonable, consideration should be given to the employee's or applicant's preferences. Southwestern reserves the right to select between equally effective accommodations in terms of cost and ease of implementation.

If an employee or applicant has any questions about a reasonable accommodation request, please email Human Resources at [hr@swlaw.edu](mailto:hr@swlaw.edu).

## **6. Potential accommodations**

Reasonable accommodations may include modifying a workstation, changing job duties or schedule, telecommuting, reassignment to another position, or time off (with or without pay), provided that the accommodations do not pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others in the workplace or the requesting employee or applicant. The goal of accommodation is to help the individual perform the essential job functions and meet normal performance standards.

## **7. Denial of a requested accommodation**

Any employee who believes they have been subjected to discrimination or harassment based on a disability may file a complaint under Southwestern's Policy to Prevent Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation. Employees or applicants may also file a grievance if their request for a reasonable accommodation has been denied.

## **8. Grievances**

Grievances under this policy should be submitted to the Chief Operating Officer (COO) within 10 business days after the individual becomes aware that a requested accommodation has been denied.

For full-time faculty members, grievances should be submitted to the Dean or a Vice Dean within 10 business days after the faculty member becomes aware that a requested accommodation has been denied.

Southwestern may extend these timeframes in extenuating circumstances, such as illness, the need for assistance in preparing the grievance, or other reasonable factors that prevented timely filing.

A complaint must be in writing and contain the name and address of the person filing it. The complaint must state the reasonable accommodation that was sought, the basis for the requested accommodation, and the stated reason for the denial.

The COO (or designee), Dean, or Vice Dean, as applicable, will investigate the complaint. This investigation may be informal, but it must be thorough, allowing the parties to submit evidence relevant to the complaint. The COO may consult with others, such as the Dean, General Counsel, and the employee's supervisor. The Dean or Vice Dean may consult with others, such as the General Counsel. The COO will maintain Southwestern's files and records relating to the grievance.

The COO, Dean, or Vice Dean will issue a written decision on the grievance no later than 30 calendar days after it was filed. The availability and use of this grievance procedure do not prevent a person from filing a complaint of discrimination based on disability with external agencies. Individuals may file complaints with the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the California Civil Rights Department, or other appropriate federal or state agencies.

Southwestern will make appropriate arrangements to ensure that individuals with disabilities are provided with other accommodations, if needed, to participate in this grievance process. These arrangements may include, but are not limited to, providing interpreters for individuals with hearing issues, providing audio recordings of material for individuals who are blind, or assuring a barrier-free location for the proceedings. The COO will be responsible for making these arrangements.

## **F. General Provisions for Disability Accommodations**

### **1. Safety and security**

Southwestern is not required by law or this policy to grant accommodations that would violate other laws or interfere with the safety and security of our community.

### **2. Time frame**

Accommodation requests will be processed within a reasonable period based on the facts and circumstances. Requests that do not involve extenuating circumstances will be processed within 30 business days from the date of the request.

### **3. Effect on pending personnel actions**

Filing an accommodation request will not stop or delay any evaluation or disciplinary action related to an employee not performing up to acceptable standards or violating Southwestern's rules or policies. However, Southwestern will ensure that no employee is evaluated or disciplined for performance issues that result from a disability unless the law school has explored reasonable accommodation options. The accommodation process and any performance processes may run concurrently, with appropriate adjustments to be fair to the employee.

### **4. Retaliation**

Individuals will not be retaliated against for requesting an accommodation for their disability in good faith. Southwestern expressly prohibits any form of discipline, reprisal, intimidation, or retaliation against any individual for requesting an accommodation in good faith. Individuals who believe that they have been treated in a manner inconsistent with this policy should notify Human Resources.

## **G. Policy Revisions**

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without notice.