



## **WHAT LAWS PROTECT EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES?**

**Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”)** offers protection from discrimination based on disability for qualified people with disabilities. The law covers employers with 15 or more workers. Religious organizations are exempt. 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et. seq.

**Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act** offers protection from discrimination based on disability for qualified people with disabilities. The law covers state or local government employers regardless of the number of workers employed. 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et. seq.

**The Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act (“CADA”)** protects employees with disabilities regardless of the number of workers employed. Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-34-401 et. seq. It also provides protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** states that no qualified individual with a disability shall be “excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” This includes employment. 29 U.S.C. § 794.

## **WHAT IS A DISABILITY?**

Under the civil rights protections listed above, the term *disability* means:

- 1) A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; or
- 2) A record of such an impairment; or
- 3) Being regarded as having such an impairment.

42 U.S.C. § 12102(2)(A).

1) **Substantial Limitation:** A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities is not meant to be a demanding standard, but should instead be construed broadly in favor of expansive coverage. An impairment that is episodic or in remission is a disability if it would substantially limit a major life activity when active. Major life activities include activities such as caring for oneself and also include major bodily functions, such as bladder and brain functions.

The determination of whether an impairment substantially limits a major life activity must be made without regard to the ameliorative effects of mitigating

measures (with the exception of “ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses”). 42 U.S.C. § 12102(4)(E). As an example, a person with an amputated limb would still be substantially limited in a major life activity even though a prosthetic leg could cure their limitations.

The definition of disability was greatly expanded with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act in 2008. You should visit [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) for additional information for determining whether you are a person with a disability who is covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

2) **Record of Such an Impairment:** The term “record of such an impairment” means you have a history of, or have been misclassified as having, a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. For example, someone who had cancer, but now the cancer is in remission.

3) **Regarded as Having Such an Impairment:** In order to determine whether a person is regarded as having a disability, the focus for establishing coverage is on how a person has been *treated* because of an impairment. It is important to note that a person who is covered by the law because of being regarded as a person with a disability is not entitled to reasonable accommodations. Therefore, you must show that you have either an actual or record of disability in order to qualify for reasonable accommodations.

Additionally, it is important to note that in order to be a covered employee, an employee with a disability must be able to perform the **essential functions** of his/her job, with or without reasonable accommodations. Essential functions are the necessary duties and activities of the job position.

### **WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS AN EMPLOYEE WITH A DISABILITY?**

As a qualified individual with a disability, you have the right not to be discriminated against in all employment practices, such as:

- Recruitment
- Firing
- Hiring
- Training
- Job assignments
- Promotions
- Pay
- Benefits
- Lay off
- Leave
- All other employment related activities

You have a right to reasonable accommodations for your disability, so long as you can perform the essential functions of the job (please refer to the next section for a more in-depth discussion of reasonable accommodations). You have the right not to be retaliated against for asserting your rights under the ADA. The ADA also protects you if you are a victim of discrimination because of your family, business, social or other relationship or association with an individual with a disability. This is known as “associational discrimination.”

### **WHAT ARE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS?**

A reasonable accommodation is any change in the work environment or the way things are usually done that gives equal employment opportunities to a person with a disability. An accommodation is considered reasonable if it is feasible and meets the need of the person with a disability without causing an undue burden or fundamental alteration for the employer.

Reasonable accommodations may be needed:

- During the application/interview process;
- To perform the essential functions of the job; and
- For the enjoyment of equal terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.

Requests for reasonable accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

- Changes in physical accessibility of location/work site;
- Job restructuring;
- Modified work schedule;
- Acquisition or modification of work equipment;
- Modification of training materials or examinations;
- Modification of policies;
- Altering how an essential function of the job is performed; or
- Reassignment to a vacant position.

### **WHEN MUST AN EMPLOYER MAKE A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?**

An employer must make a reasonable accommodation for an employee with a known disability unless the employer can show that the accommodation would cause an undue financial burden or hardship on the operations of its business, or that providing the accommodation would pose a direct threat to the health or safety of the employee or others.

### **WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR REQUESTING AND CREATING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS?**

An employee’s request for a reasonable accommodation may be oral or in writing. For a sample letter requesting a reasonable accommodation, please see page 10 of

this informational packet. The employer and employee should engage in a productive and interactive exchange to determine the accommodations that are appropriate to the needs of the employee. If a specific accommodation is requested, the employer should consider the specific request, but may provide an equally effective alternative, even if it is not the employee's preferred accommodation.

Creating reasonable accommodations is an individualized process and will vary from person to person based on functional limitations. Keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are to be provided so as to enable the employee to perform the **essential functions of the job**.

### **WHAT MEDICAL INFORMATION MUST THE EMPLOYEE PROVIDE TO THE EMPLOYER?**

After an employee requests an accommodation, the employer can request medical documentation of the covered disability and the need for the accommodation. Any medical information provided to the employer is to be treated as confidential and kept in a record separate from the employee personnel file.

An employee need not provide all of his/her medical files; they may submit only medical information needed to establish a substantial limitation and need for accommodation.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I BELIEVE I WAS DISCRIMINATED AGAINST?**

If you suspect you have been the subject of employment discrimination, including if your employer failed to provide reasonable accommodations, you have the right to file a complaint, or charge, with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), or the Colorado Civil Rights Division (CCRD). Before doing so, you should consider whether there are routes to opening lines of communication within your employment setting, such as:

- Are you represented by a union that can advocate for your rights?
- Does your company employ an ADA Coordinator or someone who monitors compliance with discrimination laws? This information may be available through your human resources department.
- Are you a federal/state employee who may be required to enter into an internal process before filing a charge with the EEOC/CCRD?
- Is there an internal grievance procedure, an administrator with decision making powers, or a board where your issues can be heard and addressed?
- Is there an opportunity to negotiate or mediate with your employer?

Make sure you are aware of deadlines for filing the charges that are listed below. **Failure to file before the deadline may cause you to lose your right to file a claim or charge.** It is also a good idea to develop a plan to address employment discrimination.

**WHERE CAN I FILE A CHARGE OF EMPLOYMENT  
DISCRIMINATION BASED ON DISABILITY?**

**Colorado Civil Rights Division**

1560 Broadway, Suite 1050  
Denver, CO 80202  
Phone: (303) 894-2997  
Toll Free: (800) 262-4845  
V/TTY: (711) 894-2997  
askdora.colorado.gov (click on Civil Rights)  
There are satellite offices in Pueblo and  
Grand Junction, but all intakes must be  
initiated by contacting the Denver  
Office.

CCRD has jurisdiction over businesses  
regardless of the number of employees.  
CCRD may offer either group or individual  
intake.

**Equal Employment Opportunity  
Commission**

303 East 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 510  
Denver, CO 80203  
Phone: (303) 866-1300  
Toll Free: (800) 669-4000  
V/TTY: (303) 866-1950 or  
(800) 669-6820  
EEOC has jurisdiction for businesses  
with 15 or more employees.

**HOW QUICKLY MUST I FILE IN ORDER TO  
PROTECT MY LEGAL RIGHTS?**

If you are filing with **CCRD**, you must file within **180 days** from the date the  
discrimination occurred.

If you are filing with **EEOC**, you must file within **300 days** from the date the  
discrimination occurred.

You do not need to file with both agencies. To protect your legal rights, you **must**  
contact EEOC/CCRD within these timeframes; failure to do so will result in your  
inability to file a lawsuit.

**Beware of Alternative Deadlines:**

You should also be aware that Federal, State, and/or unionized employees may have  
mandatory prerequisites to the deadlines listed above. Deadlines may be within a  
few days. Requirements may include filing with an internal EEO officer.  
Additionally, other employment claims (not related to disability discrimination)  
may have different filing requirements and deadlines.

**Private Lawsuits:**

In most cases, you must file a sworn written statement (charge) with EEOC or CCRD  
before a private lawsuit may be filed in court. You must receive a right-to-sue letter  
from EEOC/CCRD prior to filing a private suit.

**WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR FILING A CHARGE WITH THE EEOC/CCRD?**

As the charging party, you should be prepared to provide the who, what, when,  
where and how of the discrimination. For example, your charge should include:

- Your name, address, and telephone number;
- Your employer's name, address, and telephone number;
- The number of employees, if known;
- A description and timeline of events, with any available documentation, to support your claim of disability discrimination;
- The names, addresses, and phone numbers of anyone who could support your claim of employment discrimination (witnesses); and
- Documentation of your disability.

When you file a charge of disability discrimination with the EEOC or CCRD, you will be assigned a charge number. An investigator will have primary responsibility for handling your complaint. The employer that you filed a charge against will have the opportunity to respond to your statements alleging discrimination. The EEOC or CCRD may request that you submit additional information related to your charge. You may be offered the chance to mediate with your employer, but mediation will occur only if you and your employer voluntarily agree to it.

After the claim has been investigated, EEOC/CCRD will determine if there is "probable cause" to substantiate discrimination and the EEOC may initiate further agency action. If EEOC/CCRD finds there is "no probable cause" to substantiate discrimination you will be provided with a right-to-sue letter that will enable you to file your complaint of discrimination in federal or state court. You will lose your right to sue if you do not file such a complaint in court within 90 days from the date on the letter. If the EEOC/CCRD finds that there is "probable cause," they may choose to pursue a lawsuit on your behalf, or they may provide you with a right-to-sue letter.

You should visit [www.dora.state.co.us/civil-rights/complaints\\_process.html](http://www.dora.state.co.us/civil-rights/complaints_process.html) (CCRD) and [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) (EEOC) for additional information on this process.

## **Employment Lawyer Referral List**

The attorneys listed below have identified themselves as having knowledge of employment law and an understanding of disability. These attorneys embrace the following values in providing services and advocacy for people with disabilities:

- Empowerment;
- Self-determination;
- Independence; and
- Inclusion.

Disability Law Colorado neither receives nor pays any compensation from/to these attorneys for their placement on this list.

### **Dale A. Gaar**

1600 Stout Street, Suite 1000  
Denver, CO 80202  
(303) 446-9300  
[www.daleagaar.com](http://www.daleagaar.com)

Specialties: Discrimination and Personal Injury

Does NOT accept: ERISA, Worker's Compensation, Federal Government Employment, Social Security, or Union Matters

### **Paula D. Griesen**

King & Greisen, LLP  
1672 York Street  
Denver, CO 80206  
(303) 298-9880  
[www.kinggreisen.com](http://www.kinggreisen.com)

Does NOT accept: Worker's Compensation, Wage/Hour Disputes, Federal Government Employment, Social Security, or Personal Injury

### **Laurie Paddock**

Law Office of Laurie Scott Paddock  
3773 Cherry Creek North Drive, Suite 575  
Denver, CO 80209  
(303) 863-0071

### **Kimberlie Ryan**

Ryan Law Firm, LLC  
283 Columbine, #157  
Denver, CO 80206  
(303) 355-0639  
[www.kimberlieryan.com](http://www.kimberlieryan.com)

Does NOT accept: ERISA, Union Matters, Social Security, Worker's Compensation

**Cynthia Wellbrock** (knows signed English sign language)

The Law Office of Cynthia Wellbrock

7887 East Belleview Ave, Suite 1100

Denver, CO 80111

(303) 785-7783

[www.cynthiawellbrock.com](http://www.cynthiawellbrock.com)

Specialties: Harassment, Discrimination, Wage/Hour Disputes

Does NOT accept: ERISA, Worker's Compensation, State/Federal Government

Employment, Employee Benefits (long/short-term disability)

### **Internet Resources**

#### **Department of Justice**

- U.S. Department of Justice: [www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov)
- Information and Technical Assistance on the ADA: [www.ada.gov/](http://www.ada.gov/)
- Definition of Disability Under the ADA: [www.ada.gov/](http://www.ada.gov/)

#### **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**

- EEOC: [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)
- EEOC Denver Field Office: [www.eeoc.gov/denver/filing.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/denver/filing.html)
- EEOC ADA Q&A: [www.ada.gov/qandaeng.htm](http://www.ada.gov/qandaeng.htm)
- EEOC Overview of Disability Discrimination:  
[www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/disability.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/disability.cfm)

#### **Colorado Civil Rights Division**

- CCRD: [www.dora.state.co.us/civil-rights/complaints\\_process.html](http://www.dora.state.co.us/civil-rights/complaints_process.html)

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***Disability Law Colorado distributes this material for informational purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. For further assistance, we suggest you contact the phone numbers/internet sites referred to in this publication, or seek the counsel of a referral attorney listed above.***

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## Sample Letter Requesting a Reasonable Accommodation from Your Employer

**[Date]**

Mr. / Ms. **[Name of Manager]**

**[Company Name]**

**[Address]**

Dear Mr. / Ms. **[Name of Manager]**:

I have worked at **[company name]** as a **[position or position in "X department" if appropriate]** since **[approximate date of hire]**. I am experiencing the following difficulties in performing my job because of my disability: **[describe the difficulties you're experiencing]**. I am writing to request that you **[state requested accommodation]** because it will **[explain how it will help you do your job]** as a reasonable accommodation.

If you have alternative suggestions regarding reasonable accommodations, please share them with me so we can work together to find a workable and effective accommodation.

I have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, and I need this accommodation to successfully perform my job.

If you have any questions about my request you can contact me in writing or by phone. However, I would appreciate a written response to this request within two weeks of the date of this letter. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

**[Your name]**

**[Your full address]**

**[Your phone number]**

**\*\*\* This resource sheet is for informational purposes only.  
Nothing herein shall be understood to be legal advice.  
For specific legal advice an attorney should be consulted. \*\*\***