

Balancing Beliefs and Business: What Employers Need to Know About Religious Accommodations in the Workplace

Labor & Employment Law Update

By Joey Wright on May 29, 2025

As modern workplaces grow increasingly diverse, employers must be prepared to accommodate employees' religious practices and observations in a respectful, inclusive, and lawful manner.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VII"), requires employers with at least 15 employees to provide reasonable accommodations for an employee's sincerely held religious beliefs, practices, or observances, unless doing so would create an undue hardship on the conduct of the employer's business.

This long-standing law is aimed at preventing employees from being forced to choose between their religious convictions and their job.

What Is Reasonable Accommodation?

Under Title VII, a "reasonable accommodation" might include schedule changes for religious holidays or prayer breaks, permitting religious expression in the workplace, modifications of workplace policies and dress codes, or even job reassignment. While employers are not required to provide any and all religious accommodations an employee may request, they are required to engage in a good-faith interactive process to identify a mutually agreeable accommodation that does not pose an undue hardship to the company.

The U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 opinion in *Groff v. DeJoy* raised the bar for what constitutes an "undue hardship." Following this decision, employers must now demonstrate "that the burden of granting an accommodation would result in substantial increased costs in relation to the conduct of its particular business." Additionally, the Court noted that lower courts may review "all relevant factors in the case at hand, including the particular accommodations at issue and their practical impact in light of the nature, size, and operating cost of an employer." This standard has greatly expanded employee rights and increased employer responsibility to seriously evaluate all accommodation requests.

Best Practices for Employers

CREATE A CLEAR POLICY AND FOLLOW IT!

Every employer should develop and implement a clear policy on how employees can make accommodation requests and how those requests are evaluated. This policy should be included in any employee handbook and made widely available to employees.

TRAIN MANAGERS, SUPERVISORS, AND HR PROFESSIONALS.

Management should have a clear understanding of the company's policy, legal obligations, and their respective duties related to requests and implementation of accommodations. Training is essential to prevent legal missteps and foster confidence in the process.

MAINTAIN AN OPEN-DOOR POLICY.

Encourage employees to speak up about their needs and values without fear of retaliation. Maintain open and transparent communication between employees and management throughout the accommodation process.

DOCUMENT THE PROCESS.

In the interest of protecting all parties, maintain thorough, confidential records of all requests, discussions, and outcomes.

EVALUATE ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS THOUGHTFULLY AND CAREFULLY.

Engage in the interactive process with the employee to understand their needs and explore solutions. Consider the actual impact on operations, finances, and other employees. Do not make assumptions and avoid stereotyping based on requests.

MONITOR AND REVISE POLICIES REGULARLY.

To ensure religious accommodation policies remain effective and compliant with changing legal requirements and laws, employers should regularly review and update their policy. Collaboration with experienced legal counsel ensures legal compliance.

Providing a religious accommodation is much more than a legal obligation—it is an essential step in fostering a supportive, inclusive workplace culture.

Employers that are respectful and transparent about their accommodation process not only reduce their legal risk, they also promote higher morale, trust, and loyalty among their workforce.

Balancing
Beliefs and
Business:
What
Employers
Need to
Know About
Religious
Accommod-
ations in
the
Workplace

Subscribe to Amundsen Davis's Legal Updates:

Balancing
Beliefs and
Business:
What
Employers
Need to
Know About
Religious
Accommod-
ations in
the
Workplace