

Administrative Policy No. 18.25

Subject: Religious Accommodation

Information Contact: Human Resources Division

Authorizing Source: [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
[29 CFR Part 1605 Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Religion](#)
[Chapter 49.60 RCW Discrimination - Human Rights Commission](#)

Effective Date: July 1, 2005

Revised: March 22, 2024

Approved By: **Original signed by Wendy Long**
Senior Director, Human Resources Division

Purpose

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) will not discriminate against an employee or job seeker because of their religion. It is the policy of DSHS to reasonably accommodate employees and job seekers sincerely held religious beliefs and practices. This policy provides guidance on requesting religious accommodation.

Scope

This policy applies to all DSHS employees and job seekers.

Additional Guidance

[RCW 42.56.235 religious affiliation exemption](#)
[DSHS administrative policy 18.16 hiring processes](#)
[DSHS administrative policy 19.10.03 reimbursement for meals](#)
[DSHS 03-517 religious accommodation request form](#)
[DSHS religious accommodation request form](#)

Definitions

Appointing authority: An individual lawfully authorized to appoint, transfer, layoff, reduce, dismiss, suspend, or demote employees. [WAC 357-01-025](#)

Job seeker: An individual who has indicated to DSHS an interest in employment by completing a preliminary profile or by submitting an application.

Religious belief: Includes theistic beliefs and non-theistic moral or ethical beliefs about right and wrong, which are sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views. Personal preferences are not “religious” beliefs.

Undue hardship: A request for reasonable accommodation that has been denied because the accommodation would have a substantial negative impact on the business needs of the department.

Policy Requirements

A. Employee Responsibility

1. An employee who has a religious belief or practice that conflicts with a workplace rule has the right to request reasonable accommodation.
2. An employee who has a religious belief or practice requiring reasonable accommodation has the responsibility to inform their supervisor/manager, or [human resource division \(HRD\) business partner](#), either orally or in writing, of the existence of a conflict between their religious belief or practice and a workplace rule, and the need for a reasonable accommodation.
3. The employee is responsible for providing documentation to support their religious accommodation request through their [HRD business partner](#), to assist the appointing authority or their designee, in making the determination.
4. If the request for religious accommodation is related to a request for reimbursement, the request must be submitted within 15 calendar days of incurring the expense.
5. An employee has 30 calendar days from the date the religious accommodation decision is issued to request a review of the decision from the HRD senior director or their designee.
6. The decision of the HRD senior director or their designee is final.

7. The employee has the right to refuse reasonable accommodation.

B. Department Responsibilities

1. DSHS must acknowledge receipt of the request for religious accommodation. HRD will begin processing a religious accommodation request within 30 calendar days of receipt.
2. If an employee gives their supervisor written information, the supervisor is to immediately forward the document(s) to HRD.
3. The contents of the religious accommodation are confidential. [RCW 42.56.235](#)

C. Reasonable Accommodation Process

1. Each request for religious accommodation will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering the conflict between the workplace rule and the employee's religious belief or practice, the accommodation request, the employee's work, and the program's business needs.
 - a. DSHS is not required to make an exemption from a workplace rule if the rule is safety based or if the rule is a legal requirement.
 - b. DSHS is not required to reasonably accommodate a religious belief or practice if there is an undue hardship.
2. Decisions regarding an employee's reasonable accommodation will be made by the appointing authority or designee. If two or more effective accommodations exist, and after considering the preference of the requester, the appointing authority or designee may select the reasonable accommodation(s) to be provided. The reasonable accommodation unit within HRD is available to assist and advise as needed.
3. The employee must be notified in writing if DSHS determines their request for reasonable accommodation is denied, documenting the reasons for the denial.
4. HRD processes the decision, making sure the employee receives a written copy of the decision, whether or not the decision is approved or denied.
5. The [HRD business partner](#) loops in the appointing authority immediately after receiving the request for religious accommodation.

- a. If the accommodation is approved, the decision will include a religious accommodation case number, maintained by HRD.
 - b. If the religious accommodation determination is related to a request for an exception to the travel reimbursement policies under [DSHS administrative policy 19.10.03 reimbursement for meals](#), the employee may enter this case number on requests for reimbursements from the travel and expense management system (TEMS).
6. All documents related to the request for religious accommodation must be submitted to the HRD imaging unit to be placed into the management operations document imaging system (MODIS).

D. Determining Undue Hardship

1. DSHS must provide reasonable accommodation to employees or job seekers who have a religious belief or practice that conflicts with a workplace rule unless doing so will impose an undue hardship on the operation of its business.
2. Before concluding a particular accommodation imposes an undue hardship, DSHS will consider whether there are alternative options that would not impose such a hardship.
3. The secretary or their designee will review and make the final determination on requests for accommodation where concerns exist regarding undue hardship of the requested accommodation.
4. DSHS will provide written justification to the individual for any decision not to provide reasonable accommodation because of undue hardship.

E. Job seekers

1. Job seekers may request accommodation of religious beliefs or practices during the examination, interview, or selection processes. See [DSHS administrative policy 18.16 hiring processes](#).
2. Information about a job seeker's religion gained through this process is confidential and cannot be used to determine whether to hire the candidate.