

Create Centralized Accommodation Fund for State Employees with Disabilities



ASK

Please ask the Administration and the Legislature to put \$100,000 into the State of Alaska, Department of Administration, to create a Centralized Accommodation Fund (CAF) for state employees with disabilities.

WHAT

1. Like many employers, the state of Alaska is experiencing critical shortfalls in staff at all levels and in all departments. At the same time, although employment of persons with disabilities has trended up recently, people with disabilities are still underemployed and unemployed at much greater levels than the general population making this a perfect time for the state of Alaska to establish incentives that lead to hiring qualified Alaskans with disabilities.
2. The state of Alaska is an employer that often hires individuals with disabilities. The state has established the Provisional Hire program which allows its hiring managers to directly hire job seekers with disabilities without using the standard recruitment process via Workplace Alaska. To qualify, the job seeker must be enrolled and actively engaged in services with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Labor, and Workforce Development. The Provisional Hire process allows candidates an opportunity to work in any open state position for a trial period of up to four months if they meet the minimum qualifications for the position. If successful, the individual may convert to a probationary status, subsequently leading to permanent placement. For information on Alaska's Provisional Hire program, please visit: <https://labor.alaska.gov/dvr/provisional.html>
3. Unfortunately, a pervasive myth exists across both public and private sectors that hiring individuals with disabilities means that the employer will incur high

job accommodation costs—that they are expensive employees. The National Job Accommodation Network and other studies have concluded that most workers with disabilities do not need accommodations. In fact, 56% of accommodations do not cost anything. The ones that do, typically cost less than \$500 per individual. Employers also reported that providing accommodations resulted in substantial benefits to the business.

<https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm>

4. Many large public and private employers have discovered that the number one way to dispel this myth is to create a Centralized Accommodation Fund (CAF) that hiring managers can tap into for job accommodation costs such as environmental modifications and/or computer hardware/software that are specifically for the individual.
5. Establishing a Centralized Accommodation Fund in state government was recognized as a critical necessity by the Work Matters Task Force, established by Governor Mike Dunleavy. It became **Recommendation #3** in the recently issued, *“Alaska Work Matters Task Force Report”*. The CAF could also support **Recommendation #4**, which is to increase state employment for people with the most significant disabilities by providing on site personal assistance services when necessary to maintain employment.
<https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/AKWorkMattersReport.pdf>
6. Massachusetts and Minnesota have excellent models of how a CAF works. **Massachusetts** operates a [Reasonable Accommodation Capital Reserve Account](#) designed to supplement existing agency resources. State agencies can make requests for supplemental funding for accommodations to the Massachusetts Office of Disability and Office of Access and Opportunity, which are then evaluated. If approved, funds are disbursed until the reserve account is exhausted for that fiscal year. At least \$100,000 has been made available to supplement state agency budgetary resources in previous years.

The [accommodation fund](#) in **Minnesota** has two goals—“to provide equal footing for applicants with disabilities during the hiring process” and “to provide for a more inclusive workplace environment.” The state’s Department of Administration can reimburse up to \$1,000 for current employees’ one-time expenses, recognizing that under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) there is no limit to expenses reimbursed for applicants and ongoing expenses

incurred for current employees unless the agency can demonstrate undue burden. In 2016, the legislature authorized \$200,000 for the fund.

7. The Council believes that \$100,000 is a good amount to start a CAF in FY 2024, and if the fund needs replenishing from year to year that a very small fraction of all state government annualized personnel costs be used to maintain the CAF in the future.

ASK

Please support setting up a Centralized Accommodation Fund for Employees with Disabilities within State Government

i

-
- ¹Job Accommodation Network states, "Employers reported providing accommodations that resulted in such benefits as retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing workers' compensation, and training costs, and improving company diversity. The employers participating in this survey reported a high percentage (56%) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to implement (\$0), while the rest of the accommodations made had a typical cost of only \$500. This \$500 typical cost has been consistent across the many years of the JAN survey. <https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm>
 - ¹ **Massachusetts** operates a [Reasonable Accommodation Capital Reserve Account](#) designed to supplement existing agency resources. Established in fiscal year 2009, state agencies may make requests for supplemental funding for accommodations to the Massachusetts Office of Disability and Office of Access and Opportunity, which are evaluated. Funds are then disbursed until the reserve account is exhausted for the current fiscal year. In past years, at least \$100,000 has been made available to supplement state agency budgetary resources.
 - The [accommodation fund](#) in **Minnesota** has two goals—"to provide equal footing for applicants with disabilities during the hiring process" and "to provide for a more inclusive workplace environment." The state's Department of Administration can reimburse up to \$1,000 for current employees' one-time expenses, recognizing that under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) there is no limit to expenses reimbursed for applicants and ongoing expenses incurred for current employees unless the agency can demonstrate undue burden. In 2016, the legislature authorized \$200,000 for the fund.