STATE OF NEW YORK

2598

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

January 19, 2021

Introduced by M. of A. FALL -- read once and referred to the Committee on Governmental Operations

AN ACT to amend the executive law, in relation to requiring employers to engage in a good faith cooperative dialogue with employees who request accommodation due to a religious practice or observance

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Subdivision 10 of section 296 of the executive law, as amended by chapter 166 of the laws of 2000, paragraph (a) as amended by chapter 154 of the laws of 2019, and paragraph (b) as amended and paragraphs (c) and (d) as added by chapter 539 of the laws of 2002, is amended to read as follows:

10. (a) It shall be an unlawful discriminatory practice for any employer, or an employee or agent thereof, to impose upon a person as a condition of obtaining or retaining employment, including opportunities for promotion, advancement or transfers, any terms or conditions that would require such person to violate or forego a sincerely held practice of his or her religion, including but not limited to the observance of any particular day or days or any portion thereof as a sabbath or other holy day **or religious holiday** in accordance with the requirements of his or her religion or the wearing of any attire, clothing, or facial hair in accordance with the requirements of his or her religion, unless, after engaging in a bona fide effort **which shall include a cooperative dialogue**, the employer demonstrates that it is unable to reasonably accommodate the employee's or prospective employee's sincerely held religious observance or practice without undue hardship on the conduct of the employer's business. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, an employee shall not be entitled to premium wages or premium benefits for work performed during hours to which such premium wages or premium benefits would ordinarily be applicable, if the employee is working during such hours only as an accommodation to his or her

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

LBD06142-01-1

sincerely held religious requirements. Nothing in this paragraph or paragraph (b) of this subdivision shall alter or abridge the rights granted to an employee concerning the payment of wages or privileges of seniority accruing to that employee.

(b) Except where it would cause an employer to incur an undue hardship, no person shall be required to **be present or** remain at his or her place of employment during any day or days or portion thereof that, as a requirement of his or her religion, he or she observes as his or her sabbath or other holy day **or religious holiday**, including a reasonable time prior and subsequent thereto for travel between his or her place of employment and his or her home, provided however, that any such absence from work shall, wherever practicable [~~**in the reasonable judgment of**~~] **and as agreed upon between** the employer **and the employee pursuant to a cooperative dialogue**, be made up by an equivalent amount of time and work at some other mutually convenient time, or shall be charged against any leave with pay ordinarily granted, other than sick leave, provided further, however, that any such absence not so made up or charged, may be treated by the employer of such person as leave taken without pay.

(c) It shall be an unlawful discriminatory practice for an employer to refuse to permit an employee to utilize leave **or to refuse to engage in a cooperative dialogue requested by an employee**, as provided in paragraph (b) of this subdivision, solely because the leave will be used for absence from work to accommodate the employee's sincerely held religious observance or practice.

(d) As used in this subdivision: (1) "undue hardship" shall mean an accommodation requiring significant expense or difficulty (including a significant interference with the safe or efficient operation of the workplace or a violation of a bona fide seniority system). Factors to be considered in determining whether the accommodation constitutes an undue economic hardship shall include, but not be limited to:

(i) the identifiable cost of the accommodation, including the costs of loss of productivity and of retaining or hiring employees or transferring employees from one facility to another, in relation to the size and operating cost of the employer;

(ii) the number of individuals who will need the particular accommodation to a sincerely held religious observance or practice; and

(iii) for an employer with multiple facilities, the degree to which the geographic separateness or administrative or fiscal relationship of the facilities will make the accommodation more difficult or expensive.

Provided, however, an accommodation shall be considered to constitute an undue hardship if it will result in the inability of an employee to perform the essential functions of the position in which he or she is employed.

(2) "premium wages" shall include overtime pay and compensatory time off, and additional remuneration for night, weekend or holiday work, or for standby or irregular duty.

(3) "premium benefit" shall mean an employment benefit, such as seniority, group life insurance, health insurance, disability insurance, sick leave, annual leave, or an educational or pension benefit that is greater than the employment benefit due the employee for an equivalent period of work performed during the regular work schedule of the employee.

(4) "cooperative dialogue" shall mean the process by which an employer and employee engage in good faith written or oral dialogue concerning such employee's needs for accommodation regarding his or her observance of a sincerely held practice of his or her religion, potential accommo-

dations that may address such employee's accommodation needs, and the difficulties that such potential accommodations may pose for such employer.

In the case of any employer other than the state, any of its political subdivisions or any school district, this subdivision shall not apply where the uniform application of terms and conditions of attendance to employees is essential to prevent undue economic hardship to the employer. In any proceeding in which the applicability of this subdivision is in issue, the burden of proof shall be upon the employer. If any question shall arise whether a particular position or class of positions is excepted from this subdivision by this paragraph, such question may be referred in writing by any party claimed to be aggrieved, in the case of any position of employment by the state or any of its political subdivisions, except by any school district, to the civil service commission, in the case of any position of employment by any school district, to the commissioner of education, who shall determine such question and in the case of any other employer, a party claiming to be aggrieved may file a complaint with the division pursuant to this article. Any such determination by the civil service commission shall be reviewable in the manner provided by article seventy-eight of the civil practice law and rules and any such determination by the commissioner of education shall be reviewable in the manner and to the same extent as other determinations of the commissioner under section three hundred ten of the education law.

§ 2. This act shall take effect immediately.