

# STATE OF NEW YORK

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3472

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

## IN SENATE

January 27, 2025

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Introduced by Sens. HELMING, BORRELLO, GALLIVAN -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Mental Health

AN ACT to amend the mental hygiene law, in relation to directing the commissioner of developmental disabilities to establish a procedure through which persons with developmental disabilities may choose to remain in a nonintegrated setting

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

1 Section 1. Short title. This act shall be known and may be cited as  
2 the "employment first choice act".  
3 § 2. Legislative intent. The legislature hereby supports increasing  
4 access to integrated employment settings for individuals with develop-  
5 mental disabilities. The legislature additionally finds, however, that  
6 the policy to increase integrated employment opportunities shall not  
7 preclude an individual's right to choose either an integrated or nonin-  
8 tegrated setting in accordance with such individual's personal wishes.  
9 Furthermore, the legislature supports an individual's informed choice to  
10 remain in a nonintegrated setting in order to, among other personal  
11 priorities, retain friendships, continue their participation in their  
12 community as they so choose, and, in some instances, maintain their  
13 ability to earn a paycheck.  
14 The legislature, therefore, finds that individuals with developmental  
15 disabilities, who currently participate in a nonintegrated setting,  
16 should be allowed to choose to remain in such a setting. To require such  
17 individuals to transition out of this chosen environment undermines the  
18 guiding Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which held that the  
19 Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires placement of individ-  
20 uals with developmental disabilities in integrated settings rather than  
21 nonintegrated settings, but only when such a transfer is not opposed by  
22 the affected individual. The legislature, therefore, declares this act

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

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1 to be a priority of the state's actions affecting individuals with  
2 developmental disabilities.

3 § 3. The mental hygiene law is amended by adding a new section 16.02  
4 to read as follows:

5 § 16.02 Individual's right of choice.

6 Any individual with a developmental disability who is participating in  
7 a nonintegrated setting including, but not limited to, a sheltered work-  
8 shop, and who makes an informed choice to remain in a nonintegrated  
9 setting may seek accommodation from the commissioner to allow such  
10 placement, provided that pending such request the individual may remain  
11 in the nonintegrated setting. For purposes of this section, an "informed  
12 choice" includes the informed choice of an individual or of an individ-  
13 ual's personal representative.

14 (a) Accommodations shall be granted at the discretion of the commis-  
15 sioner, who may also require that the individual has completed at least  
16 one of the following:

17 (1) Participation in at least one vocational assessment every five  
18 years in accordance with regulations promulgated by the commissioner.  
19 The primary purpose of a vocational assessment shall be to determine an  
20 individual's interests, strengths and abilities, in order to identify a  
21 suitable match between the individual and a competitive integrated  
22 employment setting;

23 (2) Completion of one trial integrated work experience every five  
24 years, which can include any work experience with or without pay in  
25 which the individual works alongside non-disabled coworkers, customers  
26 or peers, with the appropriate services and supports for a sufficient  
27 period of time to establish whether an individual's interests, skills  
28 and abilities are well-suited for the particular job. The trial inte-  
29 grated work experience shall be selected through a person-centered plan-  
30 ning process and shall be individually tailored to each person. Alterna-  
31 tively, the commissioner may consider the individual's demonstration of  
32 an inability to participate in an integrated work setting due to a docu-  
33 mented medical condition that poses an immediate and serious threat to  
34 the individual's health or safety, or the health or safety of others in  
35 an integrated work setting;

36 (3) Receipt of outreach, education and support services in accordance  
37 with regulations promulgated by the commissioner. Outreach, education  
38 and support services are services designed to explain the benefits of  
39 supported employment, as defined in subdivision eleven of section one  
40 thousand two of the education law, that address concerns of families and  
41 perceived obstacles to participation, and are designed to encourage  
42 individuals in day activity service programs, including in sheltered  
43 workshops and facility-based day programs, and their families to seek  
44 supported employment services, as defined under subdivision twelve of  
45 section one thousand two of the education law; or

46 (4) Involvement in a benefits counseling consultation in accordance  
47 with regulations promulgated by the commissioner. A benefit counseling  
48 consultation shall provide information to the individual and such indi-  
49 vidual's family or guardian about the impact of earned income on the  
50 individual's public benefits.

51 (b) The office shall ensure that individuals who are granted accommo-  
52 dation to participate in a nonintegrated setting shall continue to  
53 receive services and any additional services the office determines are  
54 necessary to enable the individual's meaningful participation in the  
55 chosen setting.

1 (c) The procedures for obtaining accommodation to remain in a noninte-  
2 grated setting shall not supersede nor bar the individual's choice to  
3 remain in a nonintegrated setting.

4 (d) The accommodation to remain in a nonintegrated setting shall not  
5 diminish the individual's eligibility for receipt of services under  
6 title eleven of article five of the social services law, and such indi-  
7 vidual's eligibility to receive such services shall be substantially  
8 similar to benefits that would have been received had the individual  
9 chosen to participate in an integrated setting.

10 (e) The commissioner is authorized to issue, amend or repeal any regu-  
11 lations as necessary to implement the provisions of this section.

12 (f) The commissioner, in consultation with stakeholders, shall take  
13 such actions as shall be necessary to comply with federal law, obtain  
14 federal funding, and assist work settings to remain eligible for federal  
15 funding, in order to enable each individual's choice, for the purpose of  
16 this section, on and after May first, two thousand twenty-nine.

17 § 4. This act shall take effect immediately.