

ASSEMBLY LABOR COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 5296

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 9, 2021

The Assembly Labor Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 5296.

Persons with disabilities are an underrepresented and largely untapped segment of the labor pool for consideration in public employment. As New Jersey's largest employer, the State should promote the awareness of persons with disabilities as a valued employee resource and work to attract, engage, retain, and promote people with disabilities in the State workforce. It is appropriate that the State move toward becoming a model employer of persons with disabilities.

This bill requires the Division of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, and the Civil Service Commission, to develop a State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities ("SAME"), program. The purpose of the SAME program will be to increase awareness of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, provide appropriate avenues and remove barriers to the application and hiring process, and create mechanisms to increase retention rates for persons with disabilities employed in the State workforce. The Affirmative Action Officer of each State agency will oversee the SAME program for that State agency.

At a minimum, and if appropriate, the SAME program will:

- review existing recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention policies and procedures applicable to persons with disabilities, including an analysis of barriers to employment;

- establish goals for the hiring and recruitment of persons with disabilities, maintain records of the progress towards achieving and maintaining the established goals, and maintain and report on the demographic data related to disability status for applicants and employees;

- use fast track hiring authority and advancement that permits State agencies to consider disability status during the hiring and promotion process;

- establish mentoring, internship, or similar work-based learning experiences for persons with disabilities;

- provide an opportunity for a qualified individual with a disability to request a mandatory interview, which will be kept confidential and separate from the agency employment applications;

include a centralized accommodation program to consolidate subject matter expertise necessary to assess, evaluate, and implement effective and meaningful accommodations and funding streams for accommodations;

establish a recruitment and referral program that connects the State agency with college students and recent graduates with disabilities;

utilize web-based application portals that are accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities; and

provide quarterly progress reports to the head of the State agency, the division, and the commission which will be publicly available and posted on the division's website.

A biannual report will be prepared and distributed to the Governor and the Legislature by the division. The report will include ongoing barriers to employment, progress made towards increasing the number of persons with disabilities employed by the State and each State agency, retention rates of persons with disabilities employed by the State and each State agency, and plans for expanding and improving employment opportunities in the upcoming year. The report may include recommendations for legislation.