

Chair: Rep. Michael Nelson
State Government Finance and Elections
February 10, 2022

Dear Chair Nelson and Committee Members,

I am writing to express my support for HF2017 and SF1570, which will adopt the recommendations of the Advisory Task Force on State Employment and Retention of Employees with Disabilities.

In 2014-2016, I contributed to the planning of the Connect 700 Program by supporting and providing expertise and statistics to the State Cross-Agency team in charge of implementing the State of Minnesota's first non-competitive hiring authorities for people with disabilities.

I personally was among the first group to obtain certificate of eligibility for Connect 700 Program. I was certified on October 24, 2016, less than two weeks from the date then-Governor Dayton announced the program to the public. My goal was to be among the first Minnesotans with disabilities to utilize the program and to secure a job through the Connect 700.

I applied for a job with the state and was offered an interview. One or two days before the day of the interview, the hiring manager contacted me. He informed me that I won't be able to take any time off, including sick leave, nor would I be able to claim any leave time of any type for the duration of the program, which is close to five months. I informed the hiring manager that I was already a state employee at this time and that I should continue to enjoy the privileges of claiming and using leave time, at least in case of illness. He insisted that this would not be allowed. Eventually, I had to withdraw from the interview process. It is irrational to force an existing state employee with disabilities to abandon rights and privileges that they already had in the state workforce in order for that individual to be considered for another job under the Connect 700 Program.

Additionally, state employee unions succeeded recently in allowing employees converting from temporary/unclassified to classified employment to serve a shorter 3-month probationary period rather than the standard 6-month. However, employees hired through Connect 700 and then converted to traditional employment are banned from enjoying this new right. They are still required to serve the full standard 6-month probationary period upon completion of the Connect 700 appointment.

Many current and former state employees shared with me disheartening stories about lack of accommodations, inadequate accommodations, and the fear they have if they ever attempt to speak up or seek advocacy to help overcome their struggle with the chronic tragedy of dysfunctional accommodation practices. As a state employee, I have personally experienced failure from the agencies I worked for to provide me with the requested and needed reasonable accommodations during my course of employment. The lack of reasonable accommodation has had significant adverse impacts on my emotional status and my abilities to perform my job.

HF2017/SF1570 adds language that will help protect new and existing state employees with disabilities. The language clearly outlines the responsibilities of hiring managers to follow the Americans with Disabilities Act so that adequate and reasonable accommodations will be provided so that state employees can perform their on-

the-job tasks without barriers. There is nothing more frustrating and dehumanizing than being hired for a job for which you meet minimum qualifications but then denied the opportunity to carry out the tasks.

I respectfully and passionately urge you to support this bill and support state employees with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Mohamed (Mourssi) Alfash, Ph.D., MBA, MPA