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AGN. NO.  
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**Los Angeles County Embracing Neurodiversity in the Workplace and Creating Career Pathways for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities**

Within Los Angeles County (County) we strive to create a workplace environment that is both supportive and inclusive, empowering everyone to reach their full potential. Developmental disabilities are a group of conditions that affect a person's physical, learning, language, or behavioral development. They can include intellectual and physical disabilities. The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) defines “disability” as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The California [Fair Employment and Housing Act \(FEHA\)](#) defines “mental disability” as having any mental or psychological disorder or condition that limits a major life activity. Neurodiversity describes the concept that people have different ways of thinking, learning, and behaving. It includes a broad range of conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy (CP), Twice Exceptional (2e), Fragile x Syndrome (FXS), Tourette Syndrome (TS), Down Syndrome, speech or language impairment, and hearing loss. Neurodiversity encompasses a spectrum of neurocognitive differences and does not always constitute a disability. These cognitive differences begin during childhood development, usually last throughout a person's lifetime, and may impact day-to-day functioning without significantly affecting job

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ability or performance.

Individuals with disabilities have more unmet health needs and often experience greater societal barriers than their peers. They are three times less likely to be employed than people without disabilities. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics individuals with developmental disabilities have reported lower employment rates, and the COVID-19 pandemic further negatively impacted these rates. Even after employment is obtained, neurodivergent workers often experience ableism in the workplace, which may negatively impact their ability to maintain financial stability and achieve promotional opportunities. This often occurs as a result of policies, practices, and procedures that center neurotypical experiences by default, without considering individuals with varying cognitive needs.

Employment is essential to financial independence, health insurance, benefits, and social relationships. Fully supporting developmentally disabled and neurodivergent employees, including those with more profound autism will require a wide range of service models that reflect the spectrum of impairments and unique needs. However, some neurodivergence generally classified as disorders, such as autism, differ in severity and potential impacts on job performance. Autism is neurodevelopmental condition specifically characterized by differences in social interaction, communication, sensory processing, and behavior patterns. The spectrum reflects a wide range of experiences, challenges, and strengths, making each person's journey unique.

Nearly 85% of individuals with autism are not meaningfully employed ([Autism Society, 2024](#)) and should be recognized for the valuable skills and talents they can offer in the workforce. Compared to their peers with other types of disabilities, young adults with autism had the lowest rate of employment. Approximately, 50,000 students with

autism graduate high school every year, hoping to find jobs as they transition into adulthood ([Drexel University, 2013](#)). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 36 children ([CDC, 2020](#)) are diagnosed with autism. In California, the statistic is even narrower at 1 in 22 children ([CDC, 2020](#)). In the next decade, more than one million young people with autism and other developmental differences will be turning 18 years old. While many initiatives have supported autism education, awareness, and acceptance in the community, the area of employment lags behind.

A more inclusive workforce welcomes unique perspectives as essential. We must continue to enhance the County hiring system to support intensive, individualized services in a range of settings, with flexibility, and an equitable approach. With the appropriate accommodations and equitable working conditions, it is possible for neurodiverse individuals to find fulfilling stable employment and thrive in the workplace. County employment opportunities offer a powerful platform for individuals to share their experiences, perspectives, and talents within the nation's largest county government, which includes over 115,000 employees. Expanding equal employment opportunities to fully include individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities will not only foster a more inclusive workforce but also provide valuable insights into the experiences of those living with developmental differences, ultimately enhancing service to residents with similar lived experiences.

Many of us may know and love someone with autism or other special needs. For parents, families, educators, professionals, and managers, understanding the contributions of disabled workers can foster a greater appreciation for neurodiversity. It will also create the valuable opportunity to provide helpful resources for those navigating the complexities of their giftedness or disabilities. Developmentally disabled and

neurodiverse professionals have the potential to positively influence the County workforce culture when their cognitive differences, strengths, and abilities provide varying insights to creative solutions. Additionally, neurodiverse talent initiatives will generate employee engagement to better understand diverse perspectives that allows us to utilize our unique talents. This will help to address challenges and bridge the gap in different communication styles. The efforts of this motion support the ADA and FEHA to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities so they can access more expansive employment opportunities and fully participate in public life. To fully realize this mission, there is a need to create specifically tailored career pathways and job opportunities that uplift disabled workers.

The County must take intentional steps to create a more supportive ecosystem that helps individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities overcome employment barriers. This is a unique opportunity to lead in fostering inclusive, accessible, and supportive workplaces for all. Expanding employment opportunities not only empowers neurodiverse individuals to achieve greater independence but also enables the County to leverage a diverse talent pool with valuable skills, abilities, and perspectives. To ensure the success, compliance, and long-term sustainability of this initiative, several key factors must be addressed:

1. Legal Compliance: It is essential that recruitment and hiring practices align with federal and state laws, including the ADA and the FEHA. While these laws encourage inclusive hiring and reasonable accommodations, they also require employment decisions based on qualifications rather than disability status alone to ensure compliance with equal employment opportunity principles.

2. Feasibility of Evaluating Workplaces: With thousands of workplaces across the

County, conducting a comprehensive evaluation for developmental disability and neurodivergent-friendly environments presents a logistical challenge. A scalable approach that identifies and prioritizes workplaces best suited for a pilot program is a practical first step toward broader implementation.

3. Cost of Accommodations: Implementing potential accommodations, such as quiet rooms, sensory-friendly spaces, or individualized training programs, can pose significant costs. Understanding these financial implications is critical, particularly regarding costs beyond those services already provided by the County's Disability Management and Compliance (DMC) programs. The current services of these programs should be leveraged to the full extent possible.

4. Training and Cultural Shift: Providing consistent and scalable training for County staff to foster inclusive workplaces will be essential. Training for colleagues, supervisors, and managers must cover how to support individuals with a wide range of developmental disabilities and cognitive needs, provide resources, and direction on when to consult with HR, disability specialists or other professionals.

5. Sustainability of the Program: Long-term success requires clear, measurable goals, dedicated resources, and ongoing support. A well-defined strategy is essential to prevent burnout, ensure continued engagement, and maintain program effectiveness over time. Regular evaluation and adaptation will be key to addressing challenges and sustaining impact.

6. Potential Resistance from Departments: Some departments may have concerns regarding hiring individuals with developmental disabilities due to the perception that there may be increased workload or lack of knowledge on how to accommodate these individuals. Overcoming this resistance is crucial to fostering a truly inclusive workforce,

ensuring compliance with equal employment laws, and demonstrating the County's leadership in diversity and accessibility.

7. Impact on Benefits (SSI/SSDI): Many individuals with developmental disabilities rely on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and may be hesitant to seek employment due to concerns about losing their benefits. To mitigate this disincentive, the program should provide education on benefit protections, available work incentives (such as the [Ticket to Work program](#)), and strategies to ensure financial stability while pursuing employment.

8. Defining Success: Establishing clear metrics is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of this initiative. Key indicators should include employee retention rates, job satisfaction, successful implementation of reasonable accommodations, and overall workplace inclusivity. Regular assessments and feedback loops will help refine the program and ensure long-term success.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Human Resources (DHR), in collaboration with the Departments of Aging and Disabilities, Economic Opportunity, Library, County Counsel, the Chief Executive Office (CEO), other relevant County departments, and the Los Angeles County Commission on Disabilities, to conduct a comprehensive exploration of the feasibility of increasing employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and neurodiversity including, but not limited to, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy (CP), Twice Exceptional (2e), Fragile x Syndrome (FXS), Tourette Syndrome (TS), Down Syndrome, speech or language impairment, and hearing loss. This exploration should include the following in a report back to the Board within 180 days on the initial findings related to the development

of a pilot program, feasibility of accommodations, potential partnerships, and any legal or financial considerations:

### **1. Pilot Program Development:**

- a. Consult with internal and external experts and agencies, including but not limited to the California Department of Rehabilitation, the California Department of Developmental Services, the California Employment Development Department, Regional Centers, and Independent Living Centers regarding best practices for implementing programs targeted at increasing employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, as well as other forms of neurodivergence. This should also include leveraging knowledge from DHR's existing employment pipeline programs.
- b. Identify departments or specific jobs with variable salary ranges that exist in several departments that can serve as a pilot program to test the feasibility of creating developmental disability-friendly hiring practices and workplaces.
- c. Hiring practices should align with guidance from the CEO's Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative to provide equitable work opportunities and inclusive hiring practices for job candidates with developmental disabilities and identify appropriate job requirements, exam plans, and relevant training opportunities for staff involved in hiring.
- d. There should be a focus on aligning candidate skills with job requirements to help County departments appropriately match situations and solutions.
- e. Workplaces should assess the effectiveness of reasonable accommodations such as individualized training, sensory-friendly spaces, and modified work processes for developmentally disabled and neurodivergent employees.

- f. Explore methods for voluntary identification of current employees in targeted demographics (e.g., through surveys or other methods). Such employees can serve as a resource for recruitment and innovation.
- g. Develop and implement ongoing and graduated training programs for supervisors, managers, and employees within pilot departments on how to effectively integrate and support individuals with developmental disabilities and appropriately support neurodivergent employees. This may also include the addition of one-on-one and/or tailored consultative services.
- h. Explore legal ramifications to ensure compliance with the Americans with the ADA and FEHA, as well as other relevant federal and state laws to avoid discriminatory practices and ensure equitable hiring.

**2. Assessment of Accommodations and Cost Analysis:**

- a. Assess the various types of potential reasonable accommodations that may be needed to support individuals with a range of neurocognitive differences and analyze the potential costs associated with these accommodations (e.g., extensive one-to-one training, noise reductions, quiet spaces, modified lighting, etc.) to ensure successful integration, performance, retention, and growth.
- b. Assess current County workplace facilities, and County projects in development as workplaces for County employees, for appropriateness to include reasonable accommodations in the existing or planned facilities.
- c. Assess remote, and work-from-home opportunities as a potential source of reasonable accommodations.
- d. Engage the County's existing Disability Management & Compliance Framework to provide reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis,



based on individual needs and departmental capacity.

### **3. Identification of Necessary Resources:**

- a. Identify internal County resources (e.g., HR staff, Departmental Disability Management & Compliance Coordinators, budget) that can be leveraged to support the implementation of the initiative.
- b. Identify and partner with external organizations, including non-profits and community groups specializing in developmental disabilities, that can provide expertise, resources, and support for job candidates and County departments.

### **4. Sourcing and Recruitment of Job Applicants:**

- a. Collaborate with community-based and nonprofit organizations, schools/colleges, and vocational programs that work with individuals with developmental disabilities to identify and inform potential applicants about job opportunities within the County.
- b. Explore partnerships with public and private entities that have successfully integrated employees with developmental disabilities into their workforce to share best practices.

### **5. Development of Success Metrics:**

- a. Establish clear and measurable metrics to track the success of this initiative, including the number of individuals with developmental disabilities hired, employee retention rates, satisfaction of employees with developmental disabilities, effectiveness of training for supervisors and managers, amount or number of consultations, availability of resources, and the number of accommodations provided.
- b. Develop a system for tracking these metrics and reporting bi-annually to the

Board of Supervisors on the initiative's progress, challenges, and any additional resource or funding needs.

**WE FURTHER MOVE**, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch, in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to:

**1. Support legislative or regulatory proposals that promote employment rights, including proposals that:**

- a. Eliminate the Federal subminimum wage for workers with disabilities under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which permits certificate-holding employers to pay workers with disabilities less than the minimum wage.
- b. Address threshold limits to create non-interference with Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income payments if work is disrupted and allow stipend or regular payment that does not interfere with other benefits received.
- c. Provide flexibility to maintain Local and State benefits, including In Home Supportive Services, non-cash-based benefits, and regional center services.

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