

Office of the Statewide EEO Coordinator **EEO Connection Newsletter**

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Statewide EEO Coordinator's Message

Welcome to the latest edition of the EEO Connection newsletter, a quarterly publication for state of Maryland government employees. The Office of the Statewide EEO Coordinator team appreciates your readership and support. As we begin the first quarter of 2026, we're excited to share some updates and news.

First, the [FY 2025 Annual Statewide EEO Report](#) is now available. The report includes information on the state government workforce, specifically the executive branch agencies. The information includes, but is not limited to, data pertaining to hires, promotions, terminations, and agencies' EEO programs and notable statewide trends.

Secondly, the OSEEOC team will be hosting a virtual Statewide EEO Group meeting on Thursday, January 29, 2026. A meeting invitation will be sent to all Fair Practices Officers, EEO Officers, and ADA Coordinators. It is strongly encouraged that at least one member from each agency's EEO team is in attendance.

Thirdly, the OSEEOC will host professional development opportunities from February 9, 2026, to February 13, 2026. In addition, an ADA Coordinators meeting and a Sexual Harassment Prevention Train-the-Trainer session will be offered in March 2026. Registration information can be found on pages 11-12.

With that said, turn to page 4 and read about Governor Moore's statement on the election of Joseline Peña-Melnyk as the new Speaker of the House. On page 5, read about how the Department of Justice issued a final rule updating its regulations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and eliminating disparate-impact liability. On pages 6-9, read about noteworthy rulings. That's not all: turn the page to read more.

Nicole Webb, MBA, SHRM-CP
Statewide EEO Coordinator

Office of the Statewide EEO Coordinator

Mission

- Administer and enforce state equal employment opportunity laws and policies.
- Promote a work environment free of any unlawful discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.
- Assist in building a well-diversified workforce for Maryland State Government employees and job applicants.

Ask the OSEEOC Team

Q: Can Fair Practices Officers and EEO Officers obtain assistance from the Employee Complaint Assistance Program (ECAP) to have external investigators assist with conducting investigations so that they can be concluded in a timely manner and in compliance with SPP 5-212. Also, through ECAP, can the external investigator assist with facilitating training and providing coverage when the requesting agency's EEO office is experiencing a staff shortage?

OSEEOC Answer:

No, this is not how ECAP was intended to be utilized. The OSEEOC established ECAP to address state agencies' periodic need for assistance from an external investigator, due to special circumstances that might impair or be perceived to impair the agency's ability to perform an objective investigation. Through ECAP, participating EEO Officers may volunteer based on their availability to conduct investigations for sister agencies upon request in the event of a conflict. For example, 1. The accused is the agency head or the investigator's immediate supervisor; 2. The investigator has a relationship, either personal or professional, with the complainant, the respondent, or both; 3. The investigator, due to personal reasons, feels they cannot be objective; or 4. Other situations are to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Can Human Resource professionals also attend the Statewide EEO Group meeting, since their work often overlaps with EEO's?

OSEEOC Answer:

Yes, HR professionals within state government that are interested in attending should contact the OSEEOC team at oseeoc.dbm@maryland.gov to request the meeting invitation.

EEO Spotlight

Governor Moore Statement on the Election of Joseline Peña-Melnyk as the Next Speaker of the House

Governor Wes Moore released the following statement on the election of Joseline Peña-Melnyk as the next Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates.

“The members of the Maryland House of Delegates have elevated a leader who defines public service in every beautiful sense of that phrase. Joseline Peña-Melnyk is a fighter—someone who doesn’t just believe in the dignity of all Marylanders, but who actively channels that belief into action.”

“I’ve had the privilege of calling Chair Peña-Melnyk an ally and a friend for years. We’ve stood shoulder-to-shoulder on issues that touch all Marylanders, from protecting reproductive freedom to fighting back against a White House that wants to make health care more expensive. I look forward to our continued partnership as she assumes this new role.”

“Former Speaker Adrienne Jones leaves big shoes to fill. But I have complete confidence that Joseline Peña-Melnyk will carry forward—and build on—Speaker Jones’ profound legacy of leadership, while also building a legacy of her own.”

Read more at: <https://governor.maryland.gov/news/press/pages/Governor-Moore-Statement-on-the-Election-of-Joseline-Pe%C3%BLA-Melnyk-as-the-Next-Speaker-of-the-House.aspx>

EEO Spotlight

Department of Justice Rule Restores Equal Protection for All in Civil Rights Enforcement

From the Justice Department's press release published on Tuesday, December 9, 2025

The Justice Department issued a final rule updating its regulations under Title VI of the Civil Rights of 1964. This rule ensures that our nation's federal civil rights laws are firmly grounded in the principle of equal treatment under the law by eliminating disparate-impact liability from its Title VI regulations.

"For decades, the Justice Department has used disparate-impact liability to undermine the constitutional principle that all Americans must be treated equally under the law," said Attorney General Pamela Bondi. "No longer. This Department of Justice is eliminating its regulations that for far too long required recipients of federal funding to make decisions based on race."

"The prior 'disparate impact' regulations encouraged people to file lawsuits challenging racially neutral policies, without evidence of intentional discrimination," said Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "Our rejection of this theory will restore true equality under the law by requiring proof of actual discrimination, rather than enforcing race- or sex-based quotas or assumptions."

"For over 50 years, the prior disparate-impact rule fostered the very thing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited — discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. But with today's rule," said Chief of Staff and Supervisory Official for the Office of Legal Policy Nicholas Schilling. "The Department reaffirms Congress' commitment to measure all Americans by merit."

Click here to read more: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-rule-restores-equal-protection-all-civil-rights-enforcement>

Noteworthy Ruling

EEOC Recovers \$135,000 for Florida Employees Under Pregnant Workers Fairness Act

The Miami District of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) successfully conciliated two discrimination charges on behalf of pregnant women.

The first charge, against Brandt Information Services, Inc., a technology solutions company based in Tallahassee, Florida, claimed the company terminated a pregnant employee in November 2023 after she requested two and a half months of unpaid leave as a reasonable accommodation under the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA). Under the terms of the conciliation agreement, Brandt will pay the former employee \$100,000 and provide robust injunctive relief, including implementation of a new policy allowing employees to request leave as a reasonable accommodation under the PWFA, even if they do not qualify for leave under the Family Medical Leave Act.

“The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act gives workers the right to receive reasonable accommodations, such as leave, light duty, breaks, or a stool to sit on for pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions, unless it would be an undue hardship on the employer,” **said EEOC Miami District Director Evangeline Hawthorne.** “Despite being in effect for more than two years, the EEOC continues to find that many employers have not yet provided adequate training on the PWFA.”

The second charge, against Health and Behavior Dimensions, Inc. (HBD), a behavioral health provider based in Hallandale Beach, Florida, claimed the non-profit organization denied a pregnant employee an accommodation under the PWFA in March 2024. According to the employee, HBD refused to engage in the required interactive process and instead fired her on the same day she requested an accommodation. Under the terms of the conciliation agreement, HBD will pay the former employee \$35,000, provide equal employment opportunity training to all employees, and report annually on discrimination complaints received by the organization.

Click here to read more: <https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-recovers-135000-florida-employees-under-pregnant-workers-fairness-act>

Noteworthy Ruling

Movers Settles EEOC Discrimination Cases

Meathead Movers Inc., the largest independent moving company based in San Luis Obispo, California, agreed to pay up to \$2 million for individuals who were not hired into various positions due to age or because of their sex, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), announced.

The company agreed to hire qualified individuals into various positions including laborers, movers, customer service agents, and other positions, committing up to \$1 million annually for four years towards agreeing to hiring aggrieved workers / individuals, i.e. workers who applied, were otherwise qualified, but for discrimination, were not hired, making the total settlement value possibly as high as \$6 million.

The EEOC lawsuit – filed in 2023 – alleged that since at least 2017, Meathead Movers failed to recruit and to hire individuals over the age of 40 and advertised in a way to deter older workers from applying for positions. The EEOC further alleged that the company had, among other things, subjective hiring criteria favoring very young workers, serving as a proxy for age.

“Employers should not make assumptions about a candidate’s ability to do a job simply because of their age or sex and should make sure that their hiring and recruiting practices are based on the individual abilities and not stereotypes,” **said Anna Y. Park, regional attorney for the EEOC’s Los Angeles district.** “We commend Meathead Movers for their commitment to hiring older workers and women into positions based on their qualifications.”

Such alleged conduct violates the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA). The EEOC filed suit (EEOC v. Meathead Movers, Inc., Case No.: 2:23-cv-01877) in U.S. District Court for the Central District of California after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement through its administrative conciliation process. The consent decree, signed and approved by U.S. District Court Judge Dale S. Fischer on Oct. 14, 2025, also resolves a discrimination investigation on behalf of women who were segregated into packer positions and/or denied hire into mover positions which the EEOC said violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963.

Click here to read more: <https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/meathead-movers-settles-eeoc-discrimination-cases>

Noteworthy Ruling

EEOC Sues Advocate Aurora Health for Religious Discrimination

Advocate Aurora Health, an Illinois-based hospital system, violated federal law when it refused to accommodate a nurse's religious beliefs and fired her for failing to receive a COVID-19 vaccination, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit.

The EEOC's lawsuit alleged that in 2021, Advocate Health implemented a policy mandating that all employees receive a COVID-19 vaccination unless they were granted an exemption because of their religious beliefs. A nurse requested a religious exemption in accordance with the policy, and although Advocate Health previously granted her a "lifetime" religious exemption from receiving the flu vaccine, it denied her request for an exemption from COVID-19 vaccination. When the employee, consistent with her religious beliefs, declined to receive the vaccination, Advocate Health terminated her, according to the suit.

"Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees' religious beliefs in the workplace," **said Catherine Eschbach, acting EEOC General Counsel.** "An employer must provide accommodations of employees' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices, provided it can do so without undue hardship to the employer's business. The EEOC will continue to vigorously enforce this keystone law."

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination because of an individual's religion and requires employers to reasonably accommodate an employee's religious beliefs, observance or practice unless doing so would cause an undue hardship. The EEOC filed suit (EEOC v. Advocate Aurora Health, Inc., Case No. 1:25-cv-15411) in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement through its administrative conciliation process.

Click here to read more: <https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-sues-advocate-aurora-health-religious-discrimination>

Noteworthy Ruling

EEOC Sues Horseshoe Casino and Caesars Entertainment Companies for Disability Discrimination and Retaliation

Casino operators CBAC Borrower, LLC, doing business as Horseshoe Casino, Caesars Baltimore Management Co., LLC, and Caesars Entertainment, Inc., violated federal law when they discriminated against an employee on the basis of disability and engaged in unlawful retaliation and interference, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, the companies discriminated against a man who worked as a table games dealer at their Horseshoe Casino in Baltimore, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The employee became ill while working on the casino floor and was transported to a local hospital in April 2023. The suit alleged that after the employee underwent disability-related surgery, he inquired about returning to work and asked for information about accommodations but the casino companies failed to engage in an interactive process, did not provide accommodations, unlawfully concluded that the employee could work only if he had no restrictions, fired him, and refused to reinstate or rehire him. The companies also unlawfully retaliated against the employee and interfered with protections provided to him by the ADA, the suit said.

“Employers must not discriminate against disabled workers by preventing their return from medical leave because they have disability-related restrictions,” **said Debra Lawrence, regional attorney for the EEOC’s Philadelphia District Office.** “Employers have a duty to engage in an interactive process to identify and provide reasonable accommodations. The Commission is committed to enforcing the rights secured by the ADA and remedying unlawful retaliation and interference with those rights.”

Click here to read more: <https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-sues-horseshoe-casino-and-caesars-entertainment-companies-disability-discrimination>

2026 Diversity Calendar

January 2026

Date	Holiday
January 1	New Years Day (State offices closed)
January 19	Birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (State offices closed)

February 2026

- Black History Month

Date	Holiday
February 16	Presidents Day (State offices closed)

March 2026

- Women's History Month
- Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month
- Greek-American Heritage Month
- Irish-American Heritage Month

Date	Holiday
March 8	International Women's Day
March 17	St Patrick's Day

Meetings and Trainings

February 2026

Statewide EEO Program Overview - Virtual Session

Date: Monday, February 9, 2026

Time: 10:00 am - 11:30 am

Click here to register: <https://forms.gle/biL3kxw1KcXDAekz7>

MD Whistleblower Law Information Session: Virtual Session

Date: Tuesday, February 10, 2026

Time: 10:00 am – 11:30 am

Click here to register: <https://forms.gle/xLTLqfN6A61kdBnk9>

The Fundamentals of the Americans with Disabilities (ADA), Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act, State Disability Laws and Policies, and the Reasonable Accommodations Process – Virtual Session

Date: Wednesday, February 11, 2026

Time: 10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Click here to register: <https://forms.gle/QL3KDrXRBb1BeBH36>

Reasonable Accommodation Requests and the Interactive Process – A Hands-on Approach: Virtual Session

Date: Friday, February 13, 2026

Time: 10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Click here to register: <https://forms.gle/82FCL3ScNv2jPgif9>

Meetings and Trainings

March 2026

Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Train-the-Trainer – Virtual Session

Presented by: Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR)

Date: Wednesday March 4, 2026, and Thursday, March 5, 2026

Time: 9:00 am – 3:00 pm each day

Click here to register: <https://forms.gle/krApwVzQdV6haijs9>

ADA Coordinators Meeting – Virtual Session

Date: Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Time: 10:00 am – 11:30 am

Click here to register: <https://forms.gle/9WT4WhMfToB6W6m26>

Resources for EEO Professionals

Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

dors.maryland.gov

US Department of Labor

www.dol.gov

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

www.dbm.maryland.gov/employees/Pages/EAP.aspx

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

www.eeoc.gov

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

askjan.org

Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR)

mccr.maryland.gov

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

www.shrm.org

Maryland Department of Disabilities

mdod.maryland.gov

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates

outandequal.org

Chimes

chimes.org

Maryland LGBT Chamber of Commerce

mdlgbt.org

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