

## GENERAL RULES (GR)

### NEW RULE 33. Requests for Accommodation by Persons with Disabilities

**(a) Definitions.** The following definitions shall apply under this rule:

(1) “Accommodation” means measures to make each court service, program, or activity, when viewed in its entirety, readily accessible to and usable by an applicant who is a qualified person with a disability, and may include but is not limited to:

(A) making reasonable modifications in policies, practices, and procedures;

(B) furnishing, at no charge, auxiliary aids and services, including but not limited to equipment, devices, materials in alternative formats, qualified interpreters, or readers; and

(C) as to otherwise unrepresented parties to the proceedings, representation by counsel, as appropriate or necessary to making each service, program, or activity, when viewed in its entirety, readily accessible to and usable by a qualified person with a disability.

(2) “Applicant” means any lawyer, party, witness, juror, or any other individual who has a specific interest in or is participating in any proceeding before any court.

(3) “Court” means any court or other agency or body subject to the rulemaking authority of the Supreme Court.

(4) “Person with a disability” means a person covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (§ 42 U.S.C. 12101 *et seq.*), RCW 49.60 *et seq.*, or other similar local, state, or federal laws. This term includes but is not limited to an individual who has a physical or mental impairment that limits one or more major life activities, has a documented history of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.

(5) “Qualified person with a disability” means a person with a disability who is otherwise entitled to participate in any program, service, or activity made available by any court.

**(b) Process for Requesting Accommodation.**

(1) An application requesting accommodation may be presented *ex parte* in writing, or orally and reduced to writing, on a form approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts, to the presiding judge or officer of the court or his or her designee.

(2) An application for accommodation shall include a description of the accommodation sought, along with a statement of the impairment necessitating the accommodation. The court may require the applicant to provide additional information about the qualifying impairment to help assess the appropriate accommodation. Medical and other health information shall be submitted under a cover sheet created by the Administrative Office of the Courts for use by applicants designated "SEALED MEDICAL AND HEALTH INFORMATION" and such information shall be sealed automatically. The court may order that such information be sealed if it has not previously automatically been sealed.

(3) An application for accommodation should be made as far in advance as practical of the proceeding for which the accommodation is sought.

**(c) Consideration.** A request for accommodation shall be considered and acted upon as follows:

(1) In determining whether to grant an accommodation and what accommodation to grant, the court shall:

(A) consider, but not be limited by, the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (§ 42 U.S.C. 12101 *et seq.*), RCW 49.60 *et seq.*, and other similar local, state, and federal laws;

(B) give primary consideration to the accommodation requested by the applicant; and

(C) make its decision on an individual- and case-specific basis with due regard to the nature of the applicant's disability and the feasibility of the requested accommodation.

(2) If an application for accommodation is filed five (5) or more court days prior to the scheduled date of the proceeding for which the accommodation is sought, and if the applicant otherwise is entitled under this rule to the accommodation requested, the accommodation shall be provided unless:

(A) it is impossible for the court to provide the requested accommodation on the date of the proceeding; and

(B) the proceeding cannot be continued without prejudice to a party to the proceeding.

(3) If an application for accommodation is filed fewer than five (5) court days prior to the scheduled date of the proceeding for which the accommodation is requested, and if the applicant otherwise is entitled under this rule to the accommodation requested, the accommodation shall be provided unless:

(A) it is impractical for the court to provide the requested accommodation on the date of the proceeding; and

(B) the proceeding cannot be continued without prejudice to a party to the proceeding.

(4) If a requested accommodation is not provided by the court under subsection (c)(2) or (c)(3) of this rule, the court must offer the applicant an alternative accommodation.

**(d) Denial.** Except as otherwise set forth in subsection (c)(2) or (c)(3) of this rule, an application for accommodation may be denied only if the court finds that:

(1) the applicant has failed to satisfy the substantive requirements of this rule;

(2) the requested accommodation would create an undue financial or administrative burden;

(3) the requested accommodation would fundamentally alter the nature of the court service, program, or activity; or

(4) permitting the applicant to participate in the proceeding with the requested accommodation would create a direct threat to the safety or well-being of the applicant or others.

**(e) Order.** The court shall issue an order consistent with its decision. If the court denies a requested accommodation pursuant to section (d) of this rule, the order shall specify the reasons for the denial. If a requested accommodation is not provided by the court under subsection (c)(2) or (c)(3) of this rule, the court's order shall include a description of:

(1) the facts and/or circumstances that make the accommodation impossible under subsection (c)(2) or impractical under subsection (c)(3); and

(2) the reasons why the proceeding cannot be continued without prejudicing a party to the proceeding.

The court shall inform the applicant and the court personnel responsible for implementing accommodations that the request for accommodation has been granted or denied, in whole or in part, and the nature of the accommodation to be provided, if any.

**(f) Duration of Accommodation.** The accommodation ordered shall commence on the date set forth in the order granting the accommodation and shall remain in effect for the period specified in the order, which may be extended as the court deems appropriate. The court may grant an accommodation for an indefinite period or for a particular proceeding or appearance.

#### **Comment**

Access to justice for all persons is a fundamental right. It is the policy of the courts of this state to assure that persons with disabilities have equal and meaningful access to the judicial system. Nothing in this rule shall be construed to limit or invalidate the remedies, rights, and procedures accorded to any person with a disability under local, state, or federal law.

[Adopted effective September 1, 2007.]