

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION POLICY

Effective June 1, 2025



State of California

Gavin Newsom, Governor

California Environmental Protection Agency

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State Water Resources Control Board

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Table of Contents

I. POLICY STATEMENT	4
II. DEFINITIONS	5
III. AUTHORITY	6
Federal Laws	6
Federal Regulations	6
California Laws and Directives.....	7
IV. APPLICABILITY, ROLES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES.....	7
A. Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs (OPEETA)	7
B. Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOO)	8
C. Leadership of State and Regional Water Boards	9
D. All California Water Boards Staff.....	9
E. Members of the Public	9
V. PUBLIC REQUESTS FOR REASONABLE ACCOMODATIONS	10
Step 1: Submit a Request	10
Step 2: Participate in the Interactive Process.....	11
Step 3: Implementation	11
Step 4: Provide Feedback	11
Step 5: Closing the Request.....	11
VI. PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS	12
Step 1: Submit a Complaint	12
Step 2: Acknowledgment and Intake	13
Step 3: Internal Review and Resolution	13
Step 4: Implementation and Communication	13
Step 5: Continuous Improvement	14
VII. External Complaint Options	14
California Civil Rights Department (CRD)	14
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA)	15
VIII. CONFIDENTIALITY	15
IX. RETALIATION PROHIBITED	16
X. REQUESTING ALTERNATIVE FORMATS	16
XI. DISCLAIMER.....	16

XII. POINT OF CONTACT17

I. POLICY STATEMENT

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards), collectively referred to as the California Water Boards, are committed to ensuring that all members of the public - including individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), individuals with disabilities, and members of protected classes - have full and equal access to the information, programs, activities, services, benefits, facilities, and employment opportunities administered by the California Water Boards. This includes providing reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

The California Water Boards do not discriminate and are committed to advancing accessibility, equity, and inclusion. Individuals with disabilities have a legal right to reasonable accommodations which are protected by a variety of state and federal laws. The California Water Boards affirm the right of individuals with disabilities to request and receive reasonable accommodations that enable full participation in government programs, services, and activities.

This Reasonable Accommodations Policy (Policy) outlines the California Water Boards' commitment to taking reasonable steps to provide accommodations for individuals with disabilities to support their access to California Water Boards' programs, services, facilities, and employment opportunities. It establishes the process for requesting reasonable accommodations and filling a complaint, and provides implementation guidance to staff.

The California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to provide the following accommodations free-of-charge:

- Auxiliary aids and services (e.g., screen readers, assistive listening devices)
- Physical accessibility modifications (e.g., accessible meeting locations)
- American Sign Language interpretation
- Real-time captioning (CART services)
- Alternative format vital documents (e.g., Braille, large print)
- TTY/TDD phone services for individuals with hearing impairments

Through this Policy, the California Water Boards affirm their responsibility to provide inclusive and accessible services so that all members of the public have equal and meaningful opportunities to fully participate in decision-making processes affecting California's water resources.

II. DEFINITIONS

For this Reasonable Accommodation Policy, the following terms are defined below:

Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator: A Board-designated individual that ensures compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and state anti-discrimination laws.

Assistive Communications Services: Tools, devices, and services that ensure effective communication for individuals with hearing, speech, or visual impairments, including American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART), telecommunication relay services (TTY/TDD), Braille, large print materials, and assistive listening devices.

Complainant: Anyone filing a complaint under this policy.

Meaningful Access and Communication: Ensuring timely, accurate, and effective assistance at no cost for individuals with assistive communication needs so they can access services, programs, and benefits at a level equivalent to individuals without disability-related limitations. Agencies must take reasonable steps to prevent delays, restrictions, or inferior quality in communication.

Professional Sign Language Interpreter: A professional who interprets signed communication into spoken language and vice versa, ensuring accurate and impartial translation of both content and context. Must possess a current and valid certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) at the level of Certificate of Interpretation (CI), Certificate of Transliteration (CT), or CI and CT (Certificate of Interpretation and Certificate of Transliteration); or must have a current and valid membership with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) at the Level of Generalist (III), Advanced (Level IV), or Master (Level V).

Qualified Individual with a disability:

(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this definition, an individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable modifications to rules, policies, or practices, the removal of architectural, communication, or transportation barriers, or the provision of auxiliary aids and services, meets the essential eligibility requirements for the receipt of services or the participation in programs or activities provided by the Water Boards; and

(2) With respect to employment, an individual with a disability who meets the definition of "qualified" in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's regulation implementing Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Retaliation: to intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual or group, either:

(a) For the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege guaranteed by state and federal laws

(b) Because the individual has filed a complaint or has testified, assisted, or participated in any way in an investigation, proceeding or hearing under this policy, or has opposed any practice made unlawful by the state and federal laws incorporated in this policy.

Vital Documents: Written material, whether paper or electronic, containing information that significantly impacts an individual's ability to make decisions about their participation in a program, or that contain essential information about programs, services, and benefits which are necessary for individuals to receive, benefit, or participate meaningfully in California Water Boards' programs or services.

III. AUTHORITY

State and federal laws guarantee the public's right to equal access to government services, information, fair treatment, and meaningful involvement. This Reasonable Accommodations Policy is guided by those laws and the regulations that implement them.

Federal Laws

1. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990: Prohibits state and local agencies from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. Agencies must ensure that communication with individuals with disabilities is as effective as communication with others, including providing accessible formats and assistance when needed.
2. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance.

Federal Regulations

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): The Code of Federal Regulations is the official compilation of rules issued by federal agencies to implement federal laws. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) enforces protections through:

1. 40 C.F.R. Part 7: Implements Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and

Section 13 of the Clean Water Act—to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in programs or activities receiving U.S. EPA funding.

2. 40 C.F.R. § 7.85(g): Requires any recipient of EPA financial assistance to promptly notify the EPA's Office of Civil Rights if a lawsuit or administrative complaint is filed against them alleging discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in connection with EPA-funded programs or activities.

California Laws and Directives

1. California Government Code, Section 11135: Prohibits discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and disability in any program or activity that is conducted, administered, or funded directly or indirectly by the State of California.
2. Executive Order N-16-22, Advancing Equity: Directs California state agencies to embed equity, inclusion, and accessibility into their operations, policies, and strategic planning. The order emphasizes reducing disparities, enhancing public engagement, and ensuring equitable access to government services and benefits.

IV. APPLICABILITY, ROLES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This Reasonable Accommodation Policy applies to all California Water Boards staff and to services, programs, and activities provided to the public. It ensures that California Water Boards staff incorporate reasonable accommodation considerations into planning, communication, and delivery of services.

A. Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs (OPEETA)

- a. Serve as the California Water Boards' Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator and lead entity for implementing this Policy. This role is responsible for responding to public requests for reasonable accommodations for Water Boards services, programs, and meetings. It does not include responsibility for reasonable accommodation requests from Water Boards staff or job candidates, which are handled through the Equal Employment Opportunity Office.
- b. Provide training, guidance, and technical assistance to all California Water Boards staff on reasonable accommodation requirements and complaint handling.

- c. Receive requests for reasonable accommodation and facilitate the reasonable accommodation process for members of the public and fulfil reasonable requests through:
 - Facilitating an interactive process with the requesting individual, relevant California Water Boards staff, and — when necessary — health care providers.
 - Identify effective, reasonable accommodations that do not fundamentally alter California Water Boards programs or impose an undue burden.
 - Retain documentation of all approved reasonable accommodations and maintain secure, confidential records of any related medical information.
 - Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing accommodations in collaboration with program staff and the individual receiving the accommodation.
 - Coordinate with program leads and legal counsel when addressing complex, high-risk, or recurring accessibility issues.
- d. Receive and respond to reasonable accommodation complaints.
- e. Ensure timely and appropriate resolution of complaints, coordinating with relevant California Water Boards programs and leadership as needed.
- f. Maintain an internal log of reasonable accommodation requests and accommodations provided.
- g. Maintain an internal log to track reasonable accommodation complaints, responses, and trends to inform systemic improvements and compliance efforts.
- h. Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this Policy across all Regional Water Boards, Divisions, and Offices; identify areas for improvement; and report significant trends or concerns to executive leadership.

B. Equal Employment Opportunity Office

- a. Coordinate the interactive process and implementation of reasonable accommodations for California Water Boards employees and applicants with disabilities.
- b. Collaborate with managers, supervisors, and Human Resources to evaluate and implement reasonable accommodations that do not impose an undue hardship.
- c. Provide training and guidance to managers and supervisors on their responsibilities related to employee accommodations.
- d. Note: The Equal Employment Opportunity Office **does not** handle reasonable accommodation requests or complaints from members of the public, with the

exception of candidates applying for Water Boards positions. Public reasonable accommodations requests and complaints are handled by the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs.

C. Leadership of State and Regional Water Boards

- a. Ensure staff are aware of and comply with this Policy.
- b. Ensure new staff onboarding includes training and familiarization with this Policy.

D. All California Water Boards Staff

- a. Review and comply with the requirements of this Policy.
- b. Participate in onboarding and training related to this Policy.
- c. Promptly refer any reasonable accommodation requests or complaints from the public directly to the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs.
- d. Participate in the interactive process with the person requesting reasonable accommodation and the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs to identify potential reasonable accommodations.
- e. Promptly implement agreed-upon accommodations and ensure all affected parties are informed.
- f. Collaborate with the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs in resolving reasonable accommodation complaints related to their program or area of work.
- g. Respect the privacy and dignity of individuals requesting reasonable accommodation and filing reasonable accommodation complaints and maintain confidentiality as required by law.
- h. Inform members of the public that they have the right to request reasonable accommodations and to file a complaint.

E. Members of the Public

- a. Request reasonable accommodations as needed when engaging with the California Water Boards with sufficient time for the Water Boards to provide requested accommodations.
- b. Participate actively in the interactive process to identify appropriate accommodations.
- c. Provide feedback on the effectiveness of the accommodations provided.
- d. Individuals filing reasonable accommodation complaints:
 - a. Submit complaints regarding inadequate or denied accommodations

- b. Provide sufficient details about the issue, including time, location, and nature of the barrier
- c. Participate actively in follow-up discussions to resolve complaints effectively.

V. PUBLIC REQUESTS FOR REASONABLE ACCOMODATIONS

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to programs, services, or activities that enables individuals with disabilities to have equal access and effective communication. Examples include:

- Sign language interpretation
- Documents in Braille or large print
- Real-time captioning (CART)
- Allowing service-animals in spaces where pets are normally prohibited

The California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to provide accommodations at no cost to the public. Reasonable accommodations will be provided unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the program or impose an undue financial or administrative burden, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Any member of the public or their representative may request a reasonable accommodation to participate in a California Water Boards meeting, event, or service by taking the following actions:

Step 1: Submit a Request

Reasonable accommodations should be requested as far in advance as possible. For meetings and public events, submit requests at least ten days before the scheduled meeting date. Requests should be made in writing to the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs and should include:

- The name of the person requiring accommodation
- Contact information (phone, email)
- The meeting, service, or document for which an accommodation is being requested
- Any relevant details about the request

Submission Methods

- **Online Form (preferred method):** [Request Form](#)
 - The Reasonable Accommodation Request Form is available in several languages.
- **Email:** accommodations@waterboards.ca.gov
- **Phone:** (916) 341-5254
- **Mail:**
Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs
Reasonable Accommodations Coordinator
State Water Resources Control Board
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100

Step 2: Participate in the Interactive Process

The Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs will engage in a timely, good-faith interactive process with the individual requesting accommodation and the relevant program area. The process may include:

- Clarifying the request
- Determining what accommodations are reasonable
- Consulting with program staff or a qualified healthcare provider (if necessary)

Note: Documentation may be requested to substantiate the need for an accommodation, but a specific diagnosis is **not** required.

Step 3: Implementation

Once an accommodation is approved, notification will be shared with the person requesting accommodation and with the relevant program staff. The accommodation will be promptly implemented and provided free of charge. The California Water Boards will not place a surcharge on individuals with disabilities to cover the cost of auxiliary aids or modifications.

Step 4: Provide Feedback

If the accommodation is ongoing, periodic feedback on the effectiveness of the accommodation is requested. After accommodations have been provided, the California Water Boards may follow up to assess the effectiveness of the accommodation. Members of the public are encouraged to provide feedback about their experience.

Step 5: Closing the Request

The Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs will retain documentation of all approved reasonable accommodations and will securely maintain any confidential medical information that may have been provided during the interactive process or with a request. Feedback received will be used to improve the California Water Boards' processes, staff training, and accessibility policies.

VI. PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS

Members of the public have the right to file a complaint (also known as grievance) if they believe they were denied reasonable accommodation. Complaints may be submitted by the affected individual or their representative.

Step 1: Submit a Complaint

Complaints should be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than 60 calendar days after the denial of, or failure to provide accommodation. This deadline may be extended if the complainant, through reasonable diligence, could not have discovered the facts earlier.

Complaints must be made in writing to the Reasonable Accommodations Coordinator in the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs and should include:

- Your name (and if applicable, the name of your representative or the individual you are representing)
- Contact information (Complainant's name and means of communicating such as phone, email, mailing address)
- A description of the incident, including:
 - Date, time, and location
 - Relevant California Water Boards staff or program involved
 - A detailed account of the alleged failure to provide a reasonable accommodation or other accessibility barrier, including whether the complaint involves discrimination based on disability or retaliation for requesting an accommodation. Describe, to the extent possible, how the denial or delay of accommodations affected the individual's ability to access or participate in California Water Boards programs, services, or activities.

Submission Methods

- **Online Form (preferred method):** [Online Complaint Form](#)

- **Email:** complaints@waterboards.ca.gov
- **Phone:** (916) 341-5254
- **Mail:**
Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs
Reasonable Accommodations Coordinator
State Water Resources Control Board
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100

The Online Complaint Form is available in several languages. Complaints do not need to be written in English. The California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to ensure the complaint process is accessible to individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities. Alternative formats (e.g., interviews, audio recordings, large print) are available upon request.

Step 2: Acknowledgment and Intake

Once a complaint is submitted, the Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator will acknowledge receipt and may schedule a meeting with the complainant to gather additional information. Complainants may also share proposed resolutions or recommendations.

Step 3: Internal Review and Resolution

The Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator will:

- Notify relevant California Water Boards program staff and the Office of Chief Counsel.
- Convene an internal review meeting to evaluate the complaint, supporting documentation, and applicable policies.
- Determine appropriate corrective actions based on the facts of the case and the nature of the alleged violation. Complaints will be evaluated using the preponderance of the evidence standard, meaning the determination will be based on whether it is more likely than not that a policy violation occurred.

Corrective actions may include:

- Providing the requested accommodation or service
- Translation or interpretation of requested materials
- Training, coaching, or disciplinary action for involved staff, as appropriate
- Revisions to internal processes

Step 4: Implementation and Communication

The Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator will:

- Implement corrective actions promptly.
- Document all steps taken in the internal tracking system.
- Provide the complainant a written notice of the outcome of the investigation, including whether a violation was found and a summary of the actions taken or planned in response.
- Offer an opportunity for the complainant to provide feedback or request additional assistance.

Step 5: Continuous Improvement

The California Water Boards will regularly review complaint trends, feedback received, and emerging needs to ensure continuous improvement. All complaint records are maintained securely and used to inform staff training and system improvements.

VII. EXTERNAL COMPLAINT OPTIONS

If a complaint does not meet the criteria for a violation of this Policy but nevertheless raises concerns that warrant further review, the Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator may, at their discretion, refer the complaint to the appropriate party for follow-up. The complainant will be informed, either verbally or in writing, before any such referral is made.

This complaint procedure is not a prerequisite for seeking judicial or other forms of external relief, nor does it limit or preclude a complainant from pursuing such remedies. Members of the public who believe the California Water Boards have not adequately addressed a complaint related to disability access or accommodations may also contact the following agencies:

California Civil Rights Department (CRD)

The California Civil Rights Department complaint process is designed to address instances of discrimination within State of California-funded programs. To begin the process, an intake form can be filed and submitted in one of three ways:

- Online by creating an account and using CRD's interactive [California Civil Rights System](#)
- Email: contact.center@calcivilrights.ca.gov

- Phone: (800) 884-1684 (voice), (800) 700-2320 (TTY) or California's Relay Service at 711
- Mail:
California Civil Rights Department
651 Bannon Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95811

More information on how to file a complaint with the California Civil Rights Department can be found on the [Complaint Process webpage](#).

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency complaint process is designed to address instances of discrimination against recipients of federal funding. A complaint may be submitted in one of three ways:

- a. Email: Title_VI_Complaints@epa.gov
- b. Phone: (202) 564-3316
- c. Mail:
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of External Civil Rights
Mail code 2310A
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

More information on how to file a complaint with the U.S. EPA can be found on the U.S. EPA [Filing a Discrimination Complaint Against a Recipient of EPA Funds](#) webpage.

VIII. CONFIDENTIALITY

The California Water Boards strive to protect the confidentiality of anyone requesting reasonable accommodation and any complainant, as well as all participants in the complaint process to the greatest extent possible and as authorized by law. However, the nature of these processes do not permit absolute confidentiality. The Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator may release information as necessary to evaluate and resolve the request for reasonable accommodation or complaint.

If, in the course of reviewing or responding to a complaint, the California Water Boards become aware of information that warrants further personnel action, a separate personnel investigation may be initiated. In such cases, information

provided through the complaint process may be shared with appropriate California Water Boards personnel and outside parties, including the State Personnel Board, as part of that process.

VIII. RETALIATION PROHIBITED

The California Water Boards strictly prohibit retaliation against anyone who files a complaint or participates in the complaint process. This includes individuals who report concerns, pursue a complaint, or assist in an investigation.

Retaliation is illegal under state and federal law, including 40 C.F.R. Parts 5 and 7. The California Water Boards will not tolerate any form of discipline, intimidation, or retaliation for exercising rights protected under this Policy or applicable law.

Anyone who believes they have experienced retaliation may file a complaint with the California Water Boards using the procedures outlined in this Policy.

IX. REQUESTING ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

This Reasonable Accommodation Policy is translated into Spanish. If you need this document in an alternative format (i.e., Braille, large print), or another language, please email LanguageServices@waterboards.ca.gov or call (916) 341-5254.

X. DISCLAIMER

This Policy is intended to provide guidance on the implementation of reasonable accommodation requirements. It does not create any enforceable rights, obligations, or legal standards beyond those already established under applicable federal and state law. This Policy does not apply to other governmental agencies or external entities unless specifically stated.

This Policy is intended to complement—not supersede—any existing laws, regulations, or policies. Nothing in this Policy shall be interpreted to prevent the California Water Boards or California Environmental Protection Agency from taking timely action to fulfill legal obligations to protect public health, ensure accessibility, or safeguard the environment.

XI. POINT OF CONTACT

For questions or concerns about this Reasonable Accommodation Policy, please contact the Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator in the State Water Board's Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs.

Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator: Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs Director

Phone: (916) 341-5254

Email: complaints@waterboards.ca.gov

Address: 1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

Website: [Home Page](#) | [California State Water Resources Control Board](#)
[Public Request for Language Services](#) | [California State Water Resources Control Board](#)