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**Developments in Disability Discrimination  
Law  
2023-2024****Amber K. Dodds  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction.....	1
II. EEOC Regulations.....	1
III. The Ministerial Exception and the ADA.....	1
A. Supreme Court Affirms Application of Ministerial Exception to ADA Claims of Teacher and Confirms that Exception is Not Based on Rigid Criteria.....	1
B. Circuit Split on Whether Ministerial Exception Applies to ADA Hostile Work Environment Claims.....	2
C. Supreme Court Holds that Ministerial Exception Applies to ADA Claims of Teacher Working for Ecclesiastical Corporation.....	3
IV. Impairments Under the ADA.....	4
A. Conditions Considered Impairments.....	4
B. Impairments Excluded from the ADA.....	4
1. Physical Characteristics.....	4
2. Personality Characteristics.....	4
3. Pregnancy.....	5
4. Illegal Use of Drugs.....	6
5. Sexual Conditions.....	6
6. Social Conditions.....	8
7. Obesity.....	8
8. Stress.....	10
9. Miscellaneous.....	11
C. Court Decisions on Impairments.....	11
1. Condition Did Not Rise to a Disability When It Did Not Implicate a Major Life Function or Preclude Plaintiff from Working a Broad Class of Jobs.....	11
2. Negative Side Effects of Medication can constitute an ADA Impairment.....	12
3. A Temporary Condition May Be Considered A Disability.....	13
4. Temporary Injury Not a “Substantially Limiting Impairment,” and Therefore Not a “Disability” under the ADA.....	14
5. Partial Blindness Not a Disability When it Does Not Result in a Substantial Limitation in a Major Life Activity.....	15
6. Employee’s Case of Anemia Did Not Constitute a Disability Under the ADA.....	16
7. Height Alone is Not a Disability Covered Under the ADA.....	17
8. Genetic Mutation May Constitute an Impairment if it Substantially Limits a Major Life Activity or Bodily Function.....	18
9. ADA Does Not Cover Potential Future Disabilities.....	19
V. The Three-Part Definition of Disability.....	20
A. Physical or Mental Impairment that Substantially Limits One or More Major Life Activities.....	20
B. Record of an Impairment.....	20
C. Regarded as Having an Impairment.....	21
D. Court Decisions on Regarded as Having an Impairment.....	21

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**(Continued)**

	<u>Page</u>
1. Although Teacher Did Not Have Actual Impairment, Fact Issues Remained as to Whether She Was Regarded As Disabled.....	21
2. Impairment that is Transitory <i>or</i> Minor May be the Basis for a Regarded As Claim.....	22
VI. Consideration of Mitigating Measures.....	23
VII. Major Life Activities.....	24
A. EEOC Standard for the Major Life Activity of Working.....	24
B. Court Decisions on Major Life Activities .....	24
1. Employee has the Burden to Demonstrate that He/She is Substantially Limited in Major Life Activities.....	24
VIII. Substantial Limitations .....	25
A. Recent Court Decisions on the Substantial Limitation Standard .....	25
1. Employee’s Difficulties with Workplace Airborne Irritants Did Not Rise to Level of a Substantial Limitation .....	25
IX. Qualified Individual .....	27
A. Definition .....	27
B. Recent Court Decisions on the Qualified Individual Standard .....	28
1. Worker Who Does Not Identify Reasonable Accommodation Is Not Qualified .....	28
2. Highway Worker who Could not Meet Federal Medical Exemption Requirement due to Opioid Use was not Qualified .....	29
3. Plaintiff Not a “Qualified Individual” under the ADA if Reasonable Accommodations Would Excuse Individual from Performing Essential Functions of the Job .....	30
4. “Qualified Individual” Must Show They Can Perform Essential Functions of the Job with a <i>Reasonable</i> Accommodation.....	31
X. Essential Job Functions.....	33
A. Recent Court Decisions on Essential Job Functions .....	33
1. Employee’s Opinion of Essential Job Functions Not Considered by Fact Finder .....	33
2. Full-Time, In Person Work Can be Essential Functions .....	34
3. Regular and Reliable Attendance at Work was an Essential Function of Casino’s Dealer’s Job.....	35
4. Infrequently Performed Job Functions can be Essential Job Functions .....	36
5. Temporary Removal of Essential Functions Did Not Render the Functions Not Essential .....	38
XI. Disability Discrimination.....	38
A. Lack of Prior Discipline and Temporal Proximity Alone Do Not Lead to Finding of Disability Discrimination .....	38
B. Application of Call Out Procedures Held Not to be Disability Discrimination.....	39
C. Employee’s “Rude Emails” were Non-Discriminatory Reason for Termination .....	40
D. Text Messages, Written Warnings and “Write-ups,” Alone, Did Not Constitute an Adverse Employment Action.....	41

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**(Continued)**

	<u>Page</u>
E. Employee Must Demonstrate How Proposed Accommodation will Address Medical Limitations .....	42
F. “Threat of Reassignment” is not an Adverse Employment Action for Purposes of the ADA.....	43
G. Holding Disabled Employees to Performance Standards and Performance Improvement Plans is Not Disability Discrimination .....	44
H. Employee Violation of Policies Was Lawful Reason For Termination and Not Disability Discrimination .....	45
I. Requiring Employees to Follow Procedures When Being Absent from Work is not Disability Discrimination .....	47
XII. Regarding Individuals as Disabled .....	48
A. Standard for Regarding Person as Disabled.....	48
B. Discrimination Claims under “Regarded As” Prong Require an ADA- Qualifying Physical Impairment .....	49
C. Ninth Circuit Holds that “Regarded As” Disability Requires Subjective Belief of Impairment, Not Necessarily an Impairment of a Major Life Activity.....	50
XIII. Mental and Emotional Disabilities.....	51
XIV. Misconduct and Disabilities.....	52
A. Court Decisions on Misconduct and Disabilities .....	53
1. Employer Not Required to Accept Misconduct, Even if Triggered by Employee’s Disability.....	53
2. Threats and Violent Comments are Lawful Reasons for Termination Even if Related to a Disability .....	54
3. Repeated Misconduct and Violation of Employer Guidelines Supported Termination Decision .....	55
4. Termination for Employee’s Misconduct Upheld as Legitimate Non-Discriminatory Action, Even Though the Misconduct Arose from Disability.....	58
5. Termination During Leave for Misconduct was Not a Failure to Accommodate .....	59
XV. Direct Threat to Health or Safety.....	60
A. Introduction .....	60
B. Recent Court Decisions on Direct Threat .....	61
1. Considering Additional, Non-physician Information in Determining Direct Threat.....	61
XVI. The Interactive Process .....	62
A. Key Employer Actions and Procedures for Engaging in the Interactive Process.....	63
B. Recent Court Decisions on Engaging in the Interactive Process .....	64
1. Employer’s Engagement in Interactive Process in Good Faith Prevented Failure to Accommodate Claim.....	64
2. Interactive Process Requires Real Consideration of Plausible Reasonable Accommodations.....	65

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**(Continued)**

	<u>Page</u>
XVII. Reasonable Accommodation .....	66
A. Transfer to a Vacant Position as a Reasonable Accommodation.....	67
1. Conflict in the Circuit Courts Remains Unresolved.....	67
2. Recent Court Decisions on Transfer to a Vacant Position.....	69
B. Service Animals as an Accommodation.....	75
C. Recent Court Decisions on Reasonable Accommodation.....	78
1. Employer may be Required to Provide Commute-Related Accommodation to Disabled Employee under Certain Circumstances.....	78
2. Part-Time Remote Work May be Required as a Reasonable Accommodation.....	79
3. Unpaid Leave of Absence Reasonable when Requested Accommodation Unreasonable and Would Violate Collective Bargaining Agreement.....	80
4. Obligation to Reasonably Accommodate Extends Beyond Essential Job Functions .....	80
5. Voice Dictation Software Did Not Pose Under Hardship on Employer Under ADA Factors .....	82
6. Request for Reasonable Accommodation is Not Protected Activity for Purposes of a Retaliation Claim under the TCHRA .....	83
7. Unclear Policy and Poor Implementation of Absence Policy Prevented Reasonable Accommodation of Employee Absences .....	84
8. Leave of Absence May be Appropriate Accommodation When Employee has Significant Medical Limitations.....	86
9. Employers are not Required to Provide “All of the Accommodations an Employee Feels are Appropriate” .....	87
10. Seventh Circuit Reaffirms that Employees are Not Entitled to Choose Between Effective Reasonable Accommodations .....	88
11. Tenth Circuit Reaffirms that Reasonable Accommodation Requests do not Require “Magic Words” .....	89
D. Requests For Accommodation Found to be Unreasonable or Undue Hardship .....	90
1. Work from Home Accommodations No Longer Presumed Unreasonable and Instead Require Fact-Specific Analysis .....	90
2. Removing an Essential Function is not a Reasonable Accommodation.....	91
3. List of “Workplace Suggestions” was Insufficient to Request a Reasonable Accommodation .....	93
4. Reassignment Due to Incompatible Supervisor is not a Request for Reasonable Accommodation .....	94
5. No Duty to Reasonably Accommodate When Employee Hides Medical Condition .....	95
6. Accommodation Requests Pertaining to Matters Out of Employer’s Control Are Not Reasonable.....	96
7. Employers Are Not Required to Create a New Position as an Accommodation.....	97

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**(Continued)**

	<u>Page</u>
8. Lifting Restriction Which Shifts Essential Functions onto Other Staff is Not a Reasonable Accommodation.....	98
E. Leave of Absence As a Reasonable Accommodation.....	99
1. Multiple Extensions May Be Reasonable Accommodations.....	99
2. A Prolonged Leave of Absence May Be an Undue Hardship .....	99
3. An Indefinite Leave of Absence Is Not a Reasonable Accommodation.....	100
4. Must An Employer Provide “Reinstatement Rights” During an Extension of Leave As a Reasonable Accommodation? .....	102
5. Intermittent Leave as a Reasonable Accommodation.....	105
XVIII. Hostile Work Environment.....	107
A. Analysis .....	107
B. Recent Court Decisions on Hostile Work Environment .....	107
1. Second Circuit Joins the Tenth, Eighth, Fifth and Fourth Circuits in Holding that ADA Protects Employees from Hostile Work Environment based on Disability.....	107
XIX. Interference Claims.....	109
A. Court Decisions .....	109
1. Seventh Circuit Addresses Elements of ADA Interference Claim.....	109
XX. Medical Examinations and Inquiries .....	110
A. Pre-Offer Medical Examinations and Inquiries .....	110
B. Post-Offer Medical Examinations and Inquiries.....	110
C. Medical Examinations and Inquiries Regarding Employees .....	111
D. Fitness for Duty Examinations.....	111
E. Periodic Medical Testing .....	112
F. Recent Court Decisions on Medical Inquiries and Examinations.....	113
1. Properly Administered Drug Free Workplace Policy was Non- Discriminatory .....	113
2. Test for Illegal Use of Drugs Not Automatically an ADA “Medical Examination” .....	114
G. Following Doctor’s Work Restrictions .....	115
1. Employer Can Follow Physicians Instructions Despite Employee’s Contradictory Assertions .....	115
XXI. Discrimination Due to a Relationship or Association With a Disabled Person.....	116
A. The ADA’s Inclusion of Associational Discrimination Did Not Give Rise to the Same Claim Under State Statute .....	116
XXII. Procedural and Litigation Issues.....	117
A. Former Employee Could Not Sue Based on Change in Post-Employment Distribution of Fringe Benefits .....	117
B. Retaliation Claims must show Adverse Employment Action Caused “Significant Harm”.....	119
C. Rehabilitation Act Does Not Provide for Emotional Distress Damages.....	120
D. The Doctrine Of Sovereign Immunity Cannot Be Waived Or Abrogated For ADA Claims .....	121
E. Punitive Damages Not Available Above Statutory Cap .....	121

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**(Continued)**

	<u>Page</u>
F. Single-Employer Test Does Not Allow Parent Company Employees to be Counted as Subsidiary Company Employees, for Purposes of Establishing Defendant is a “Covered Employer” under the ADA .....	122
G. ADA Discrimination Claim Against University Barred by State Sovereign Immunity .....	123
H. Discrimination Claims Based on Decades-Old Events are Time-Barred and Not Revived by Ongoing Benefit Payments .....	124
I. Late Verification of EEOC Questionnaire Does Not Necessarily Preclude Claim from Being Adjudicated .....	124
J. Divided Tenth Circuit Holds En Banc that ADA Discrimination Lawsuits Need Not be Based on an Adverse Employment Action .....	125
K. Comparison to Only Disabled Employees Cannot Demonstrate Disparate Treatment .....	126
L. Ninth Circuit Affirms “But For” Standard in ADA Discrimination Analysis .....	128
M. Second Circuit Affirms that Rehabilitation Act Causation Standard is “But For” .....	129
N. No Direct Evidence of a Disability Where an Inference is Needed to Prove a Claim .....	130
O. After-Acquired Evidence can be used to Demonstrate an Individual is Not Qualified.....	132

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ADA Charges Filed with EEOC FY 1992 – 2022\*

APPENDIX B: Impairments in ADA Charges, FY 2022\*

APPENDIX C: Mental Health Issues in ADA Charges Filed in FY 2022\*

APPENDIX D: Resolution of ADA Charges filed with EEOC in FY 2022\*

\*At the time of writing, the EEOC has not updated the statistical information on which these charts are based for fiscal year 2023.

**THIS OUTLINE IS INTENDED TO ASSIST PARTICIPANTS WITH A  
GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LAW.  
IT IS NOT A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF ALL LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS AND  
SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED LEGAL ADVICE.**

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## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<b>Cases</b>	
<i>Abouhamad v. Bank of Am., Corp.</i> , 2012 WL 4023579 (D. Mass. 2012).....	62
<i>Adam v. Maricopa County</i> , 2:19-cv-05253 (D. Ariz. Oct. 30, 2020).....	58
<i>Aka v. Washington Hosp. Ctr.</i> , 156 F.3d 1284 (D.C. Cir. 1998) .....	68
<i>Alexander v. Northland Inn</i> , 321 F.3d 723 (8th Cir. 2003).....	116
<i>Alston v. Microsoft Corp.</i> , 851 F. Supp. 2d 725 (S.D.N.Y. 2012), <i>aff'd mem.</i> , 519 Fed. App'x 23 (2d. Cir. 2012).....	99
<i>Arias v. McHugh</i> , No. 2:09-690 WBS GGH, 2010 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 60814 (E.D. Cal. 2010).....	10
<i>Arrieta-Colon v. Wal-Mart Puerto Rico Inc.</i> , 434 F.3d 75 (1st Cir. 2006) .....	107
<i>Aubrey v. Koppes</i> , 975 F.3d 995 (10th Cir. Sept. 18, 2020).....	65
<i>Barlow v. Walgreen Co.</i> , 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 34026 (M.D. Fla. 2012).....	20
<i>Barnes v. Gorman</i> , 536 U.S. 181, 122 S. Ct. 2097, 153 L.Ed.2d 230 .....	120
<i>Beasley v. O'Reilly Auto Parts</i> , 69 F.4th 744 (11th Cir. May 24, 2023) .....	80
<i>Bender v. Secretary of Defense</i> , 2022 WL 370385 (11th Cir. 2022).....	94
<i>Benson v. Wal-Mart Stores East</i> , 14 F.4th 13 (1st Cir. 2021) .....	84
<i>Billups v. Emerald Coast Utilities Authority</i> , 714 Fed. Appx. 929 (11th Cir. Oct. 26, 2017) .....	101
<i>Blatt v. Cabela's Retail, Inc.</i> , No. 5:14-cv-04822, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 75665 (E.D. Pa. May 18, 2017) (Doc. 13).....	8

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Bletz v. Wegman Food Markets, Inc.</i> , 2022 WL 4096876 (M.D. Penn. 2022).....	28
<i>BNSF Railway Co. v. Feit</i> , 663 Fed. App'x 504 (9th Cir. 2016).....	9
<i>Bowles v. Grant Trucking, LLC</i> , 842 Fed. App'x 236 (10th Cir. 2021).....	122
<i>Brunckhorst v. City of Oak Park Heights</i> , 914 F.3d 1177 (8th Cir. 2019), <i>reh'g denied</i> (Mar. 21, 2019).....	104
<i>Budde v. Kane Cnty. Forest Pres.</i> , 597 F.3d 860 (7th Cir. 2010).....	52
<i>Campbell v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.</i> , 272 F. Supp. 2d 1276 (N.D. Okla. 2003) .....	67
<i>Christopher Fox v. Costco Wholesale Corp.</i> , 918 F.3d 65 (2d Cir. Mar. 6, 2019) .....	107
<i>Clark v. Champion Nat'l Sec., Inc.</i> , 952 F.3d 570 (5th Cir. 2020).....	130
<i>Colton v. Fehrer Auto., N. Am.</i> , No. 20-12039, 2021 WL 3073780 (11th Cir. Jul. 21, 2021), <i>pet. for cert docketed</i> (Jan. 19, 2022).....	17
<i>Cuellar v. GEO Group, Inc.</i> , No. 22-50135, 2023 WL 4535079 (5th Cir. July 13, 2023).....	33
<i>Cummings v. Premier Rehab Keller PLLC</i> , 142 S.Ct. 1562 (Apr. 28, 2022).....	119
<i>D'Onofrio v. Costco Wholesale Corporation</i> , 964 F.3d 1014 (11th Cir. July 6, 2020) .....	87
<i>Darby v. Childvine, Inc., et al.</i> , 964 F.3d 440 (6th Cir. 2020).....	18
<i>Daugherty v. City of El Paso</i> , 56 F.3d 695 (5th Cir. 1995).....	68
<i>Davis v. NYC Dept. of Educ.</i> , 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 5633 (E.D.N.Y. 2012).....	49

**TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Davis v. PHK Staffing LLC</i> , 2022 WL 5167403 (D. Kan. Oct. 5, 2022).....	35
<i>Demkovich v. St. Andrew the Apostle Parish</i> , 973 F.3d 718 (7th Cir. Aug. 31, 2020).....	2
<i>Denson v. Steak 'n Shake, Inc.</i> , 910 F.3d 368 (8th Cir. 2018).....	115, 116
<i>Drerup v. Consolidated Nuclear Security L.L.C.</i> , 2022 WL 3335780 (5th Cir. 2022).....	11
<i>Drizos v. PNC Invs. LLC</i> , No. 22-1736, 2023 WL 4986496 (3d Cir. Aug. 3, 2023).....	39
<i>Dube v. Texas Health and Human Services Comm'n</i> , 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 99680 (W.D. Tex. 2011) .....	48
<i>Duckett v. Dunlop Tire Corp.</i> , 120 F.3d 1222 (11th Cir. 1997).....	99
<i>E.E.O.C. v. Agro Distrib., LLC</i> , 555 F.3d 462 (5th Cir. 2009).....	15
<i>EEOC v. Charter Commc'ns, LLC</i> , 75 F.4th 729 (7th Cir. July 28, 2023) .....	78
<i>EEOC v. Chevron Phillips Chem. Co.</i> , 570 F.3d 606 (5th Cir. 2009).....	62
<i>EEOC v. Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church &amp; Sch.</i> , 132 S. Ct. 694 (Jan. 11, 2012).....	2, 3
<i>EEOC v. Humiston-Keeling, Inc.</i> 227 F.3d 1024 (7th Cir. 2000).....	69
<i>EEOC v. Methodist Hosps. of Dall.</i> , No. 17-10539, 62 F.4th 938 (5th Cir. Mar. 17, 2023).....	68
<i>EEOC v. Sara Lee Corp.</i> , 237 F.3d 349 (4th Cir. 2001).....	68
<i>EEOC v. St. Joseph's Hosp. Inc.</i> , 842 F.3d 1333 (11th Cir. 2016).....	68
<i>EEOC v. U.S. Steel Corp.</i> , 2013 WL 625315 (W.D. Pa. 2013) .....	112

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>EEOC v. United Airlines, Inc.</i> , 693 F.3d 760 (7th Cir. 2012), cert. den'd, 133 S.Ct. 2734 (May 28, 2013) .....	67, 69
<i>Elledge v. Lowe's Home Cntrs., LLC</i> , 979 F.3d 1004 (4th Cir. Nov. 18, 2020) .....	68, 71
<i>Eshleman v. Patrick Industries Inc.</i> , 961 F.3d 242 (3rd Cir. 2020) .....	22
<i>Exby-Stolley v. Bd. of Cnty Commissioners, Weld Cnty, CO</i> , 979 F.3d 784 (10th Cir. 2020) .....	125
<i>Fisher v. Nissan North America, Inc.</i> , 951 F.3d 409 (6th Cir. 2020) .....	70
<i>Flowers v. So. Reg'l Physician Serv.</i> , 247 F.3d 229 (5th Cir. 2001) .....	107
<i>Fox v. Gen. Motors Corp.</i> , 247 F.3d 169 (4th Cir. 2001) .....	107
<i>Francis v. City of Meriden</i> , 129 F.3d 281 (2d. Cir. 1997) .....	49
<i>Frankes v. Peoria School District No. 150</i> , No. 15-3091 (7th Cir. Sept. 26, 2017) .....	109
<i>Fricke v. E.I. Dupont Co.</i> , 219 F.App'x 384 (6th Cir. 2007) .....	10
<i>Gambini v. Total Renal Care</i> , 486 F.3d 1087 (9th Cir. 2007) .....	52
<i>Garner v. Chevron Phillips Chem. Co. L.P.</i> , 834 F.Supp.2d 528 (S.D. Tex. 2011) .....	63
<i>Gaul v. Lucent Tech., Inc.</i> , 134 F.3d 576 (3d Cir. 1998) .....	10
<i>Geter v. Schneider Nat'l Carriers, Inc.</i> , No. 22-11285, 2023 WL 7321610 (11th Cir. Nov. 7, 2023) .....	34
<i>Golden v. Indianapolis Housing Agency</i> , 698 Fed. Appx. 835 (7th Cir. Oct. 17, 2017) .....	101
<i>Graves v. Finch Pruyn</i> , 18 AD Cas. (BNA) 193, 196 (2d Cir. 2006) .....	103

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Green v. United Parcel Servs., Inc.</i> , 847 Fed. Appx. 207 (5th Cir. 2021) .....	15
<i>Greenbaum v. N.Y.C. Transit Authority, et al.</i> , 2022 WL 3347893 (2nd Cir. 2022) .....	82
<i>Hannah v. United Parcel Service, Inc.</i> , 72 F.4th 630 (4th Cir. July 10, 2023) .....	80
<i>Hargett v. Fl. Atlantic Univ. Bd. of Trustees</i> , 219 F. Supp. 3d 1227 (S.D. Fla. 2016) .....	11
<i>Harrison v. Proctor &amp; Gamble Distributing, LLC</i> , 290 F. Supp. 2d 723 (S.D. Ohio 2017) .....	73
<i>Hartmann v. Graham Packaging Co.</i> , 2002 WL 219385 (S.D. Ohio, Jan. 25, 2022) .....	12
<i>Harty v. City of Sanford</i> , 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 111121 (M.D. Fla. 2012) .....	24
<i>Hassell v. Ford Motor Co.</i> , No. 21-5470, 2022 WL 43524 (6th Cir. Jan. 5, 2022) .....	123
<i>Hedrick v. W. Reserve Care Sys.</i> , 355 F.3d 444 (6th Cir. 2004) .....	69
<i>Herrmann v. Salt Lake City Corp.</i> , 21 F.4th 666 (10th Cir. Dec. 20, 2021) .....	100
<i>Huber v. Wal-Mart Stores</i> , 486 F.3d 480 (8th Cir. 2007) .....	69
<i>Hudson v. MCI Telecomm. Corp.</i> , 87 F.3d 1167 (10th Cir. 1996) .....	101
<i>Hummel v. County of Saginaw</i> , 118 F. Supp. 2d 811 (E.D. Mich. 2000), <i>aff'd</i> , 2002 U.S. App. LEXIS 14684 (6th Cir. 2002) .....	101
<i>Isrealitt v Enterprise Solutions LLC</i> , 78 F.4th 647 (4th Cir. Aug. 16, 2023) .....	118
<i>Jackson v. Oil-Dri Corp. of Am.</i> , No. 3:16-CV-189-DMB-RP, 2018 WL 1996474 (N.D. Miss. Apr. 27, 2018) .....	25

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Jennings v. Towers Watson</i> , 11 F.4th 335 (5th Cir. Aug. 25, 2021).....	14
<i>Katz v. Adecco USA, Inc.</i> , 845 F.Supp.2d 539 (S.D.N.Y. 2012).....	20
<i>Kelly v. Town of Abingdon, VA</i> , 90 F.4th 158 (4th Cir. Jan. 2, 2024) .....	93
<i>Kinney v. St. Mary’s Health, Inc.</i> , 76 F.4th 635 (7th Cir. Aug. 7, 2023) .....	90
<i>Klamrzynski v. Maricopa County Cmty. Coll. Dist., et al.</i> , 2022 WL 16848186 (D. Ariz. Oct. 14, 2022) .....	40
<i>Knope v. Garland</i> , 2021 WL 5183536 (2d Cir. Nov. 9, 2021).....	100
<i>Kunkel v. Strawberry Park Resort Campground, Inc.</i> , 2022 WL 16635387 (D. Conn. Nov. 2, 2022).....	53
<i>Lanman v. Johnson Cnty.</i> , 393 F.3d 1151 (10th Cir. 2004).....	107
<i>Lehenky v. Toshiba Am. Energy Sys. Corp.</i> , No. 22-1475, 2023 WL 3562981 (3d Cir. May 19, 2023) .....	113
<i>Lewis v. City of Union City</i> , 918 F.3d 1213 (11th Cir. 2019).....	127
<i>Lewis v. Peabody Rocky Mt. Servs. LLC</i> , 2022 WL 4245946 (D. Colo. Sept. 15, 2022) <i>app. filed</i> No. 22-1349 (10 <sup>th</sup> Cir.) .....	36
<i>Lincoln v. BNSF Railway Co.</i> , 900 F.3d 1166 (10th Cir. 2018).....	68
<i>Lockhart v. Marietta City Schools</i> , No. 20-4308, 2021 WL 4810172 (6th Cir. Oct. 15, 2021).....	55
<i>Lumar v. Monsanto Co.</i> , 795 F. App’x 293 (5th Cir. 2020).....	10
<i>Maddox v. University of Tenn.</i> , 62 F.3d 843 (6th Cir. 1995).....	52
<i>Maggio v. Konica-Minolta Bus. Solutions</i> , 578 F. Supp. 2d 969 (N.D. Ill. 2008) .....	107

**TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Martin v. Teleperformance Inc.</i> , 893 Fed. Appx. 443 (11th Cir. 2021) .....	16
<i>Matamoros v. Broward Sheriff's Office</i> , 19-13448 (11th Cir., June 25, 2021) .....	116
<i>Mauerhan v. Wagner Corp.</i> , 649 F.3d 1180 (10th Cir. 2011).....	6
<i>Mayorga v. Alorica, Inc.</i> , 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 103766 (S.D. Fla. 2012).....	5
<i>McAllister v. Innovation Ventures, LLC</i> , 983 F.3d 963 (7th Cir. 2020).....	102
<i>McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green</i> .....	56
<i>McKinney v. Cleveland Cty. Bd. of Educ.</i> , 2022 WL 895928 (W.D. N.C. March 25, 2022) .....	101
<i>Mestas v. Town of Evansville, Wy.</i> , 786 F.App'x 153 (10th Cir. Sept. 6, 2019) .....	89
<i>Micari v. Trans World Airlines</i> , 43 F. Supp. 2d 275 (E.D.N.Y. 1999), <i>aff'd mem.</i> , 205 F.3d 1323 (2d Cir. 1999).....	99
<i>Michael Murry v. Mayo Clinic</i> , 934 F.3d 1101 (9th Cir. Aug. 20, 2019) <i>cert. denied</i> .....	127
<i>Miller v. Coca-Cola Refreshments USA, Inc.</i> , 2018 WL 1456502 (W.D. Pa. Mar. 23, 2018).....	103
<i>Mitchell v. Pilgrim's Pride Corp.</i> , 817 Fed.App'x 701 (June 1, 2020).....	126
<i>Mitchell v. United States Postal Service, et al.</i> , 738 Fed. Appx. 838 (6th Cir. 2018) .....	61
<i>Mlsna v. Union Pacific Railroad</i> , 3:18-cv-00037 (W.D. Wis. Aug. 3, 2021).....	121
<i>Mobley v. St. Luke's Health Sys. Inc.</i> , 53 F.4 <sup>th</sup> 452 (8 <sup>th</sup> Cir. Nov. 16, 2022).....	64
<i>Monroe v. Fl. Dept. of Corrections</i> , 793 F. App'x 924 (11th Cir. Nov. 15, 2019).....	100

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Montague v. United States Postal Serv.</i> , No. 22-20113, 2023 WL 4235552 (5th Cir. June 28, 2023) .....	79
<i>Morriss v. BNSF Railway Co.</i> , 817 F.3d 1104 (8th Cir. 2016), <i>cert. den'd</i> 137 S.Ct. 256 (Oct. 3, 2016) .....	8, 9, 19
<i>Mundo v. Sanus Health Plan</i> , 966 F. Supp. 171 (E.D.N.Y. 1997).....	10
<i>Munoz v. Selig</i> , 981 F.3d 1265 (11th Cir. 2020).....	24
<i>Myers v. Hose</i> , 50 F.3d 278 (4th Cir. 1995).....	101
<i>Natofsky v. City of N.Y.</i> , 921 F.3d 337 (2d. Cir. Apr. 18, 2019) <i>cert. denied</i> .....	128
<i>Neri v. Bd. Of Ed. Albuquerque</i> , 860 Fed. App'x 556 (10th Cir. June 14, 2021) .....	21
<i>Norton v. Assisted Living Concepts, Inc.</i> , 786 F. Supp. 2d 1173 (E.D. Tex. 2011) .....	20
<i>Nowak v. St. Rita High Sch.</i> , 142 F.3d 999 (7th Cir. 1998).....	100
<i>Nunies v. HIE Holdings, Inc.</i> , 908 F.3d 428 (9th Cir. 2018).....	50
<i>Oquendo v. Costco Wholesale Corp.</i> , 857 Fed. Appx. 9 (1 <sup>st</sup> Cir. 2021).....	86
<i>Ostrofsky v. Department of Rehabilitation</i> , No. CIV S-07-0987 EFB PS, 2009 WL 3011578 (E.D. Cal. 2009).....	107
<i>Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru</i> , 140 S. Ct. 2049 (2020) .....	1, 2
<i>Owens v. Gov. Off. Of Stud. Achievement</i> , 52 F.4th 1327 (11 <sup>th</sup> Cir. Nov. 9, 2022) .....	42
<i>Parker v. Columbia Pictures</i> , 204 F.3d 326 (2d Cir. 2000).....	103
<i>Parker v. Crete Carrier Corp.</i> , 158 F.Supp.3d 813 (D. Neb. 2016) .....	112



## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Parker v. Crete Carrier Corp.</i> , 839 F.3d 717 (8th Cir. Oct. 12, 2016), <i>cert. den'd</i> , 2017 WL 661743 (April 3, 2017) .....	9, 112, 113
<i>Pegues v. Mississippi State Veterans Home</i> , 736 Fed. Appx. 473 (5th Cir. 2018) .....	98
<i>Perdue v. Sanofi-Aventis U.S., LLC</i> , 999 F.3d 954 (4th Cir. June 8, 2021) <i>pet. den'd</i> 142 S.Ct. 767 (Jan. 10, 2022) .....	97
<i>Pittman v. Spectrum Health Sys.</i> , 612 F.App'x 810 (6 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 2015) .....	124
<i>Priscilla L. Conners v. Robert Wilkie</i> , No. 19-2426 (7th Cir., Jan. 14, 2021) .....	38
<i>Provenzano v. Thomas Jefferson Univ. Hosp.</i> , 115 AD Cas. (BNA) 1112 (E.D. Pa. 2004) .....	103
<i>Pryor v. Americold Logistics, LLC.</i> , 2019 WL 5722223 (S.D. Ind. Nov. 5, 2019) .....	31
<i>Rascon v. US West Comms.</i> , 143 F.3d 1324 (10th Cir. 1998) .....	99
<i>Richard Turner v. Phillips 66 Company</i> , 791 F. App'x 699 (10th Cir. 2019) .....	114
<i>Richardson v. Chi. Transit Auth.</i> , 292 F. Supp. 3d 810 (N.D. Il. 2017) .....	9
<i>Richardson v. Chicago Transit Authority</i> , No. 1:16-cv-03027 (N.D. Il., Nov. 13, 2017) .....	49
<i>Saley v. Caney Fork, LLC</i> , 886 F. Supp. 2d 837, 851 (M.D. Tenn. 2012) .....	48
<i>Schmidt v. Safeway, Inc.</i> , 864 F. Supp. 991 (D. Or. 1994) .....	67
<i>Sessoms v. Trustees of Univ. of Pennsylvania</i> , 739 Fed. Appx. 84 (3d Cir. 2018) .....	74
<i>Severson v. Heartland Woodcraft, Inc.</i> , 872 F.3d 476 (7th Cir. Sept. 20, 2017) .....	101
<i>Shaver v. Indep. Stave Co.</i> , 350 F.3d 716 (8th Cir. 2003) .....	107

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Shell v. Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company</i> , 941 F.3d 331 (7 <sup>th</sup> Cir. Oct. 29, 2019) .....	19
<i>Shell v. Smith</i> , 789 F.3d 715 (7 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 2015).....	27
<i>Simmons v. Kendall</i> , 2022 WL 4775953 (W.D. Okla. Sept. 30, 2022) .....	43
<i>Skerce v. Torgeson Elec. Co.</i> , 852 F. App'x 357 (10 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 2021).....	13
<i>Smith v. Midland Brake, Inc.</i> , 180 F.3d 1154 (10 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 1999).....	68
<i>Soto v. MD Anderson Cancer Ctr.</i> , No. 21-20249, 2021 WL 5768105 (5 <sup>th</sup> Cir. Dec. 3, 2021) .....	121
<i>Soutner v. Penn State Health</i> , 841 Fed. Appx. 409 (3 <sup>rd</sup> Cir. 2021).....	47
<i>Stanley v. City of Sanford, Fla.</i> , 83 F.4th 1333 (11 <sup>th</sup> Cir. Oct. 11, 2023).....	117
<i>Stover v. Amazon.com, LLC</i> , No. 21-5421, 2022 WL 94608 (6 <sup>th</sup> Cir. Jan. 10, 2022) .....	45
<i>Sullivan v. Texas A&amp;M Univ. Sys.</i> , 986 F.3d 593 (5 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 2021), cert. denied, 142 S. Ct. 216 (2021) .....	123
<i>Sullivan v. Texas A&amp;M University System</i> , 986 F.3d 593,596 (5 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 2021).....	121
<i>Tartaro-McGowan v. Inova Home Health, LLC et al.</i> , No. 22-1825, 91 F.4th 158 (4 <sup>th</sup> Cir., Jan. 17, 2024) .....	91
<i>Taylor v. Pepsi Cola Co.</i> , 196 F.3d 1106 (10 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 1999) .....	99
<i>Terrell v. USAir</i> , 132 F.3d 621 (11 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 1998).....	68
<i>Texas Department of Transportation v. Lara</i> , 625 S.W.3d 46 (Tex. 2021).....	83
<i>Thompson v. Microsoft Corp.</i> , 2 F.4th 460 (5 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 2021).....	30

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Thorogood v. Liberty Coca-Cola Beverages LLC</i> , 2022 WL 16836975 (E.D. Penn. Nov. 9, 2022).....	41
<i>Todd v. Fayette Cty. Sch. Dist.</i> , No. 19-13821, 2021 BL 197109 (11th Cir. May 27, 2021) .....	54
<i>U.S. v. Woody</i> , 220 F.Supp.3d 682 (E.D. Va. 2016) <i>appeal filed</i> .....	68
<i>Unrein v. PHC-Fort Morgan, Inc.</i> , 993 F.3d 873 (10th Cir., Apr. 8, 2021).....	96
<i>Vantage Energy Services, Inc. v. Equal Emp't Opportunity Comm'n.</i> , 954 F.3d 749 (5 <sup>th</sup> Cir., Apr. 3, 2020), cert. den'd, 141 S.Ct. 1048 (2021) .....	124
<i>Velez v. Sprint/United Mgmt. Co.</i> , No. 6:19-cv-00987, 2020 WL 8224605 (M.D. Fl. Dec. 15, 2020) .....	59
<i>Vinh v. Express Scripts Servs. Co.</i> , 7 F.4th 720 (8th Cir. 2021).....	44
<i>Waggoner v. Olin Corp.</i> , 169 F.3d 481 (7th Cir. 1999).....	100
<i>Walsh v. United Conveyor Corp.</i> , 222 F. Supp. 2d 997, 1005 n. 13 (N.D. Ill. 2002) .....	99, 101
<i>Walsh v. United Parcel Serv.</i> , 201 F.3d 718 (6th Cir. 2000).....	99
<i>Watson v. Drexel U.</i> , No. 20-3001, 2021 WL 4429826 (3d Cir. Sep. 27, 2021).....	95
<i>Weber v. BNSF Ry.</i> , 989 F.3d 320 (5th Cir. Feb. 24, 2021).....	69
<i>Wernick v. Fed. Reserve Bank</i> , 91 F.3d 379 (2d Cir. 1995).....	69
<i>Williams v. Kincaid</i> , 45 F.4th 759 (4th Cir. 2022).....	6
<i>Williams v. United Parcel Services, Inc.</i> , 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 23080 (D.S.C. 2012) .....	27
<i>Wirtes v. City of Newport News</i> , 996 F.3d 234 (4th Cir. Apr. 30, 2021).....	68

**TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**

	<b>Page(s)</b>
<i>Woodruff v. Ohio Dept. of Trans.</i> , 2022 WL 889260 (S.D. Ohio, March 25, 2022) .....	29
<i>Yochim v. Carson</i> , 935 F.3d 586 (7 <sup>th</sup> Cir. Aug. 15, 2019) .....	88
<i>Young v. CSL Plasma, Inc.</i> , 2022 WL 263327 (D.S.C. Jan. 28, 2022).....	100
<i>Zenor v. El Paso Healthcare Sys.</i> , 176 F.3d 847 (5th Cir. 1999).....	6

## I. INTRODUCTION

This outline provides background and recent legal developments under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (the “Act” or the “ADA”), as amended by the ADA Amendments Act (“ADAAA”). This outline cannot provide an exhaustive detailing of ADA legal authority, but seeks to identify significant cases, concepts and developments related to the ADA and summarize some key ADA principles.

**Appendix A** provides information regarding disability discrimination charges filed with the EEOC. Between FY 2015 and 2017, the average number of disability-based charges filed per year was at its highest levels, between 26,838 and 28,073. From FY 2018 to 2020, the annual average decreased to slightly lower levels, at 24,238 to 24,605 charges each year. In FY 2022, charge numbers continued the downward trend, dipping to 22,843 charges, the closest charge numbers have been to 2009, when the ADAAA became effective. However, in FY 2022, charge numbers bounced back up to 25,004 charges filed, exceeding the FY 2018 – 2020 levels.

## II. EEOC REGULATIONS

The EEOC issued final regulations implementing the ADAAA on March 25, 2011, which can be found at 29 C.F.R. § 1630. These regulations include definitions, requirements and extensive commentary on many ADA topics and concepts.

The EEOC also made substantial changes to the Interpretive Guidance to implement the changes to the ADA and the regulations. The Interpretive Guidance is available at 29 C.F.R. Part 1630 Appendix.

## III. THE MINISTERIAL EXCEPTION AND THE ADA

### A. Supreme Court Affirms Application of Ministerial Exception to ADA Claims of Teacher and Confirms that Exception is Not Based on Rigid Criteria

**Case:** *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 140 S. Ct. 2049 (2020).

**Facts:** Kristen Beil worked as a lay elementary-school teacher at a Catholic primary school, substitute teaching as a first-grade instructor and teaching fifth grade. She taught all subjects, including religion, and instructed her students on the tenets of Catholicism. She signed an employment agreement and was subject to a handbook requiring that she would model the Catholic faith life, integrate Catholic thought and principles into secular subjects and prepare students to receive the sacraments. As a teacher, Beil also attended religious services with her students and prayed with them. Beil’s contract at the school was not renewed, and Beil alleged this was because she sought leave to obtain treatment for breast cancer. She sued, alleging disability discrimination.

**Issues and Decision:** The district court ruled in favor of the School, holding the ministerial exception applied. The Ninth Circuit reversed, holding that Biel lacked the credentials, training and ministerial background to be covered by the ministerial exception.

The United States Supreme Court reversed the Ninth Circuit and held that the ministerial exception applied to Biel. The Court held that the First Amendment prohibits judicial review of the manner in which private religious schools implement the education and formation of students, including employment decisions related to their teachers.

The Court reiterated its holding in *Hosanna-Tabor* that there is not a “rigid formula” to determining whether the ministerial exception applies to an individual, but instead that “all relevant circumstances” should be considered to determine whether “each particular position implicate[s] the fundamental purpose of the exception.” The Court reasoned that specific criteria (such as a “minister” title or certain formal religious schooling) need not be met for employees to be covered by the ministerial exception.

## **B. Circuit Split on Whether Ministerial Exception Applies to ADA Hostile Work Environment Claims**

**Case:** *Demkovich v. St. Andrew the Apostle Parish*, 973 F.3d 718 (7th Cir. Aug. 31, 2020), opinion withdrawn pending *en banc* review (Dec. 9, 2020); reissued 3 F.4<sup>th</sup> 968, (July 9, 2021).

**Facts:** Sandor Demkovich served as Music Director for St. Andrew the Apostle Parish. He alleged he was harassed by his supervisor, Reverend Dada, because of his sexual orientation and disabilities. Ultimately, after Demkovich married his partner, Dada demanded he resign because the marriage was against church teaching. Demkovich refused, and Dada fired him. Demkovich sued, alleging discrimination based on his sexual orientation and disability. The United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois held that Demkovich was covered by the ministerial exception and dismissed his claims. Demkovich responded by re-pleading his claims as hostile work environment claims. Initially, the Seventh Circuit held that hostile work environment claims by a minister would not automatically be barred from court review by the ministerial exception, but instead should be reviewed to determine whether the challenge was to a tangible employment action (which would be barred) or an “intangible” employment action, such as harassing behavior, that could be reviewed by the court.

Three months later, the Seventh Circuit withdrew that opinion pending *en banc* review. Ultimately, the *en banc* court issued another opinion in July 2021, holding that all hostile work environment claims of *minister-on-minister* harassment were barred from court review by the ministerial exception.

**July 9, 2021 Decision:** The court began its review by noting “two principles” that stemmed from *Hosanna-Tabor* and *Our Lady of Guadalupe*—that, while those cases involved terminations, the “protected interest of a religious organization in its ministers covers the entire employment relationship” and that the ministerial exception is to “prevent” the “harms [of] civil intrusion and excessive entanglement.” The court held that adjudicating the claim would violate both principles “and threaten the independence of religious organizations ‘in a way that the First Amendment does not allow.’”

The court held that “[p]recluding hostile work environment claims arising from minister-on-minister harassment . . . fits within the doctrinal framework of the ministerial exception” because the religious organization’s supervision of ministers is a much a component of religious autonomy as selection them in the first place. It would “be incongruous” if this autonomy “mattered only at the beginning (hiring) and the end (firing) . . . and not in between (work environment).”

Further, the court found that “probing the ministerial work environment” would interfere with a religious organization’s rights under the Free Exercise clause, and “[a]llowing the state to regulate the ministerial work environment” would violate the Establishment clause. This is because “[e]ven at its least invasive, a hostile work environment claim threatens to fundamentally alter the ministerial relationship and work environment.”

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