

Ensuring equal access for Members of Parliament

South Africa (National Parliament) - POLICY ON FACILITIES FOR MEMBERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS & POLICY ON REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities rarely become Members of Parliament; and if they do, they need equal access to all parliamentary facilities. South Africa has implemented steps that ensure the inclusiveness of its Parliament and that allow all Members with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others.

IN BRIEF

In 2006 and 2009, South Africa's Parliament introduced policies that contain extensive support measures for Members of Parliament and employees with disabilities. The provision of reasonable accommodation has led to measures that go beyond individual support and that benefit the whole Parliament. These include the establishment of institutionalised sign language interpreter services, a braille production unit, electronic text announcements, and more.

FACTS & FIGURES

- Initial years: 2006 and 2009
- Currently, 3 of the 11 Members of Parliament (MP) with disabilities and 10 employees receive support, as so MPs who have children with disabilities.
- Parliament has purchased assistive devices for sports, work, and employee's personal development.
- Parliament is developing a database to collect more information on the reasonable accommodation needs of persons with disabilities.

INNOVATION

Covering costs for reasonable accommodation

Both policies cover the costs for 'reasonable accommodation', which means to appropriately modify and adjust so as to enable persons with disabilities to work as effectively as others. This concept is a core element of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Systematic removal of barriers

The provision of reasonable accommodation has led to measures that go beyond individual support and that include the establishment of institutionalised sign language interpreter services, a braille production unit, electronic text announcements, as well as additional travel benefits for Members of Parliament with disabilities or who have disabled family members.

CONTEXT

Before the policies were developed, persons with disabilities were clearly underrepresented in Parliament's membership and staff. To overcome underrepresentation and to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy equal access to all facilities of Parliament, policies were properly researched, drafted, and developed in consultation with MPs, about 950 employees, as well as disabled peoples organizations, such as Disabled People South Africa, in order to be as inclusive as possible. It took about five years to finalize both policies. In 2006 the South African Parliament's Policy Management Unit approved the *Policy on Facilities for Members with Special Needs* and subsequently, in 2009, the *Policy on Reasonable Accommodation for Employees with Disabilities*. Both policies must be read in conjunction with the 1996 Constitution of South Africa and all relevant legislation, which includes, among others, the Employment Equity Act of 1998.

“The new South Africa should be accessible and open to everyone. We must see that we remove the obstacles. Only then will the rights of disabled persons to equal opportunities become a reality. “

—Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

KEY FEATURES

The Parliament's *Policy on Facilities for Members with Special Needs* aims to enable Members with disabilities to participate effectively by providing them with the necessary facilities. Members with disabilities must inform the Chief Whip of their party of their needs, who in turn passes the requests to the Secretary of Parliament. The Secretary can provide for several facilities, contribute to the salary of assistants, or pay specialized transportation costs. The implementation is carried out by the Facilities Unit. The *Policy on Reasonable Accommodation for Employees with Disabilities* entitles employees to reasonable accommodation and facilities. Employees are responsible for informing their respective managers, and their disability status is kept confidential. While the Human Resource Executive implements this policy, the Policy Management Unit monitors its impact.

OUTCOME, IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

- By shifting the costs for reasonable accommodation to the Parliament, Members and employees with disabilities can achieve equal results in relation to participation and productivity.
- There is a long-term impact to the policies in terms of the progressive removal of physical barriers and increased access to parliamentary information and communication – e.g., braille documentation and specialised transport services.

TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY AND COST-EFFICIENCY

Other legislatures and government departments have used both policies as the basis to develop their own policies. Both policies can be easily replicated at the Cabinet, provincial, and local council executive level (public representatives) as well as by departments and other institutions.

CONTACT

Ms. Buyile Simon BASHE

Organizational Wellness Manager, South African Parliament

bbashe@parliament.gov.za

+27 (21) 403 8044; +27 79 4394694

SOURCES

Policy on Facilities for Members with Special Needs, 2006: <http://bit.ly/1pVH9Xn>

The *Policy on Reasonable Accommodation for Employees with Disabilities*, 2009 is only available through the Parliament's intranet, but can be requested from Ms Bashe.

NOMINATED BY

Ms. Lidia PRETORIUS, Department of Social Development, South Africa