No. 18-0245

**UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE TENTH CIRCUIT**

ERIK HERNANDEZ

*Appellant*,

v.

STUART STOCKTON SYSTEMS,

*Appellee*.

*Appeal from the United States District Court*

*for the District of Colorado*

BRIEF FOR THE APPELLANT

Student’s Anonymous Identifier

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# STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

The United States District Court of Colorado had original jurisdiction over this case pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 (2012) and 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(f)(3) (YEAR) because it was a civil proceeding arising under an alleged violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12112 – 12117 (2017). This Court has jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1291 (2012) because it is an appeal from the final judgment of the district court entered on February 8, 2018.

# STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES

1. Whether Stuart Stockton Systems’ actions retaliated against Erik Hernandez for filing an administrative claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”), when it terminated his employment and provided prospective employers with negative job references, and whether the rationale of poor performance and absenteeism is merely a pretext.
2. Whether Stuart Stock Systems’ failure to provide Erik Hernandez with a modified work schedule was a failure to provide reasonable accommodations under the ADA, and thus discriminatory when Plaintiff had cancer and suffered from headaches, blurry vision and nausea.

# STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This case is about a wrongful termination and retaliation by Stuart Stockton System, against its former employee, Mr. Hernandez who had requested a modified work schedule to help him meet the demands of his work as he battled neuro glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer. This case arose out of Stuart Stockton System’s (“SSS”) termination of Erik Hernandez on January 24, 2017. Mr. Hernandez requested a modified work schedule to accommodate his illness, that was diagnosed as cancer. This request was denied, and Mr. Hernandez filed a discrimination charge with the EEOC on January 10, 2017. Two weeks later, SSS terminated Mr. Hernandez’s employment citing absences and missed deadlines. On January 2, 2018 Hernandez filed suit against SSS for discrimination and retaliation. Mr. Hernandez applied and was granted In Forma Pauperis and Appointment of Counsel. On February 8, 2018 the district court in the District of Colorado granted Summary Judgment for SSS holding that Mr. Hernandez failed to meet the prima facie cases for retaliation and discrimination. Hernandez filed a timely appeal of the final judgement of the district court February 9, 2018, and the appeal is now before this Court.

# STATEMENT OF FACTS

On January 13, 2017 Erik Hernandez was diagnosed with neuro glioblastoma, an aggressive form on brain cancer. R. at 3. Prior to this diagnosis Mr. Hernandez suffered from blurred vision, nausea and severe headaches, which he reported to his supervisor. R. at 2. Mr. Hernandez requested a modified schedule to accommodate his health concerns that was denied, R. at 2, was eventually terminated from SSS and received a negative reference from his supervisor, R. at 3.

Two years previously, in February 2015 Mr. Hernandez began work at SSS, a software developer. R. at 2. Later that year he would begin law school but discontinued his studies because of severe migraines. R. at 10; Pl.’s Appl. for In Forma Pauperis and Appointment of Counsel 2. As the severity of the headaches increased, Mr. Hernandez was unable to meet two project deadlines and missed a few days of work and so sought medical attention, receiving a neurological exam on November 17, 2016. R. at 2. On December 9, 2016 he met with his supervisor, Maeve Gryphon, to discuss his work performance. R. at 2. In the same meeting, Mr. Hernandez requested a modified work schedule to allow him to meet the requirements of the position and meet project deadlines as he struggled with his health, but Ms. Gryphon denied this request citing a new software project. R. at 2. On December 15, 2016 Mr. Hernandez’s colleague Samantha Smith became angry at him, accusing him of sabotaging the project because he had missed several meetings due to his illness. R. at 2.

On January 3, 2017 Ms. Gryphon met again with Mr. Hernandez to discuss his absence request he work better with his colleagues. R. at 3. Mr. Hernandez explained that his neurological exam had shown an abnormality, which may be cancer, and requested the following week off. R. at 3. Mr. Hernandez took the week of January 9 – 14 off work, receiving a positive cancer diagnosis on January 13, 2017. R. at 3. Mr. Hernandez’s cancer symptoms flared the following week on January 16 and 17, causing extreme dizziness, nausea, and vomiting and preventing Mr. Hernandez from working on those days in addition to January 19 and 20. R. at 3. On January 24, 2017 SSS terminated Mr. Hernandez’s employment without warning or other formal disciplinary action. R. at 3. SSS holds Mr. Hernandez responsible for the delay of their new software project, despite their being another employee with similar skills and education that could have helped the project when Mr. Hernandez’s cancer symptoms began to manifest. R. at 12, 16. At the time of his termination, Mr. Hernandez had almost completed his work on his project. R. at 12, 18.

On March 10, 2017 to pay medical bills and acquire health insurance for his treatment, Mr. Hernandez sought out new employment with E Building Solutions (“EBS”). R. at 3, 20; Pl.’s Appl. for In Forma Pauperis and Appointment of Counsel 2; Fin. Aff. for Appl. In Forma Pauperis and Appointment of Counsel 1. He passed through three rounds of interviews but was denied the position after Ms. Gryphon delivered a negative reference to Axel Rosenberg, COO of EBS on March 30, 2017, stating he strong abilities, but that he missed several deadlines and been absent from work. R. at 3, 8, 19.

On January 2, 2018 Hernandez filed suit against SSS for discrimination and retaliation. R. at 4. Mr. Hernandez applied for and was granted In Forma Pauperis and Appointment of Counsel. Pl.’s Appl. for In Forma Pauperis and Appointment of Counsel 1. On February 8, 2018 the district court in the District of Colorado granted Summary Judgment for SSS holding that Mr. Hernandez failed to meet the prima facie cases for retaliation and discrimination. R. at 22. Hernandez filed a timely appeal of the final judgement of the district court February 9, 2018, and the appeal is now before this Court. R. at 23 – 24.

# SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

This case is about an employee suffering from an aggressive form of brain cancer was discriminated against by his employer when it refused to accommodate him. The district court’s summary judgement for SSS should be reversed because there are several genuine issues of fact, which suggest SSS discriminated against Mr. Hernandez when they failed to reasonably accommodate his disability. The district court incorrectly held that the burden of proof to show that a reasonable accommodation would pose no undue hardship lay with the plaintiff, instead of as an affirmative defense. SSS knew of Mr. Hernandez symptoms, which of themselves could be seen as disabilities, and was aware of his potential cancer diagnosis. Mr. Hernandez’s request for reasonable accommodations would not have caused undue hardship as it would have allowed him to finish his work, and there was another employee with similar skills and education who would have been able to cover Mr. Hernandez duties while he was ill.

Furthermore, the courts finding that SSS did not retaliate against Mr. Hernandez should be reversed because terminating his employment and giving a negative reference to a potential employer was the adverse action with strong causal connections between them and the protected activity. The causal connection can be shown both by temporal proximity and additional evidence. The same additional evidence shows that the reasons SSS gave for terminating Mr. Hernandez and giving a negative reference were merely pretext. For these reasons, SSS retaliated against Mr. Hernandez for filing an EEOC claim, and the district court’s ruling should be reversed.

# ARGUMENT

SSS’s termination and reference of Mr. Hernandez was retaliatory because Mr. Hernandez was an extremely qualified employee, and the termination and reference occurred within two weeks and less than three months of the EEOC filing. Further, SSS discriminated against Erik Hernandez because it knew of Mr. Hernandez’ disability, his accommodation request was reasonable, and would not have caused undue hardship. The issues on review, whether the district court committed reversible error by granting summary judgment to the Defendant on Plaintiff’s claims of retaliation and discrimination, are issues of law and should thus be reviewed *de novo*, applying the same standards as the district court. *Proctor v. United Parcel Serv.*, 502 F.3d 1200, 1205 (10th Cir. 2007); *Bartee v. Michelin N. Am., Inc.*, 374 F.3d 906, 916 (10th Cir. 2004). When reviewing a summary judgement, evidence and inferences must be viewed in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party and the judgement being affirmed unless there is a genuine issue of fact. *Proctor*, 502 F.3d at 1205*.* This brief will show that Mr. Hernandez’s termination and negative reference was retaliation for his EEOC filing and that SSS knew of Mr. Hernandez’s disability, his requested accommodations were reasonable and denied, and that they would impose no undue hardship on SSS.

## SSS RETALIATED AGAINST MR. HERNANDEZ BY TERMINATING HIS EMPLOYMENT AND PROVIDING A NEGATIVE REFERENCE TWO WEEKS AND UNDER THREE MONTHS RESPECTIVELY AFTER FILING AN EEOC COMPLAINT AND ITS REASONS FOR TERMINATION WERE INCONSISTENT.

Retaliation occurs when an individual is discriminated against because he or she opposed any act or practice made unlawful under the Americans with Disability Act (“ADA”). 42 U.S.C. § 12203(a); 29 C.F.R. § 1630.12 (2018). When there is no direct evidence of retaliation, retaliation is analyzed with a burden shifting framework that requires Plaintiff to establish prima facie case for retaliation and then if Plaintiff is able to do so, burden goes to the defendant to show that the action was not discriminatory. *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792, 802 (1973). Plaintiff must then show that this reason is merely pretext. *Id.* A prima facie case for relation must show that (1) employee participated in a protected activity; (2) there was adverse employment action; and (3) there was a causal connection between the protected activity and adverse action. *E.E.O.C. v. C.R. England, Inc.*, 644 F.3d 1028, 1051 (10th Cir. 2011). Some courts require that a plaintiff show that he or she had a reasonable, good-faith belief they were disabled to prosecute a ADA retaliation claim. *Foster v. Mountain Coal Co., LLC*, 830 F.3d 1178, 1186 (10th Cir. 2016). Here, the fist requirement of a prima facie case for retaliation is met: filing administrative charges with the EEOC is a protected activity. *Proctor*, 502 F.3d at 1208; *Anderson v. Coors Brewing Co.*, 181 F.3d 1171, 1178 (10th Cir. 1999).

### SSS Committed Adverse Employment Action Against Mr. Hernandez by Terminating His Employment, and by Providing a Reference that Contributed to E Building Solutions Not Employing Mr. Hernandez.

The second element of a prima facie case, adverse employment action, has been liberally defined, requiring analysis on a case by case basis, and must meet the requirement of causing more than *de minimis* harm. *E.E.O.C.*, 644 F.3d at 1040 (holding that “hiring, firing or failing to promote” rise to the level of adverse employment action); *Sanchez v. Denver Pub. Sch.*, 164 F.3d 527, 532 (10th Cir. 1998) (finding that an increase in commute time did not rise to the level of adverse action). Employment action is adverse if it causes harm to future employment prospects. *Berry v. Stevinson Chevrolet*, 74 F.3d 980, 986–87 (10th Cir.1996) (finding that filing charges against a former employee may be adverse action); *Hillig v. Rumsfeld*, 381 F.3d 1028, 1031 (10th Cir. 2004) (holding reference that prevented plaintiff from obtaining employment as adverse action); *E.E.O.C. v. L.B. Foster Co.*, 123 F.3d 746, 753 (3d Cir. 1997) (holding the refusal of a reference can be adverse action). Negative references can be adverse action, even if the recommendation is not the sole reason for a potential employer rejecting the plaintiff. *Hashimoto v. Dalton*, 118 F.3d 671 (9th Cir.1997) (holding that a negative reference was still adverse action despite that plaintiff would not have been hired in absence of the negative recommendation). ~~Negative references may be oral or written.~~ *~~Id.~~* ~~at 1035.~~

Mr. Hernandez meets the requirements of the second element for a prima facie case of retaliation. Here, Mr. Hernandez’s employment was terminated, which meets the requirement of more than *de minimus* harm and is therefore adverse action. *E.E.O.C.*, 644 F.3d at 1040. The negative reference of Maeve Gryphon was also retaliatory. In *Hashimoto v. Dalton*, 870 F. Supp. 1544, 1554–55 (D. Haw. 1994), aff'd, 118 F.3d 671 (9th Cir. 1997), plaintiff received a negative job reference from when plaintiff’s supervisor told a potential employer of attempts at counseling and suspensions and the future employer did not consider the plaintiff for employment. Here, Ms. Gryphon informed EBS that Mr. Hernandez missed work without authorization and missed severally deadlines due to health reasons, which Mr. Rosenberg found problematic. In *Hashimoto*, the court found that the potential employer would not have hired the plaintiff even in the absence of the negative recommendation but awarded plaintiff fees and costs. Here, Mr. Rosenberg states that the reference was not dispositive, but problematic. Mr. Rosenberg states the company determined to go into international expansion and so chose a candidate with multilingual abilities. R. at 20. Like in *Hashimoto*, it is not necessary for reference to be the reason Mr. Hernandez was not hired, it is enough that the negative reference was given. 118 F.3d 671. In *Hillig v. Rumsfeld*, 381 F.3d 1028, 1035 (10th Cir. 2004), plaintiff suffered more than *de minimis* harm to future employment prospects from a negative reference when applying at the United States Attorney’s Office because the hiring authority at the Department of Justice testified that applicants with negative references would not be hired. *Id.* Here, Mr. Hernandez received a negative reference which affected his future employment at EBS, as EBS may have extended an offer to Mr. Hernandez because his strong analytical abilities despite his lack of international experience if no negative reference had been given.

### The Termination and Negative Reference Have a Causal Connection to the EEOC Filing Because the Termination Occurred Two Weeks After, and the Negative Reference Occurred Less Than Three Months Later and is Supported by Inconsistent Behavior From SSS.

The third prong, requiring causal connection between a protected activity and adverse employment action, may be shown via evidence that justifies an inference of a retaliatory motive, such as temporal proximity. *Proctor*, 502 F.3d at 1208. Closer temporal proximity may stand alone as a causal connection, but greater separation requires additional evidence to establish causation. *Ramirez v. Oklahoma Dept. of Mental Health*, 41 F.3d 584, 596 (10th Cir.1994)(stating that a one and one-half month period between protected activity and adverse action may, by itself, establish causation) overruled on other grounds by *Ellis v. University of Kansas Medical Center*, 163 F.3d 1186, 1194 – 97 (10th Cir. 1998); Richmond v. ONEOK, Inc., 120 F.3d 205, 209 (10th Cir.1997) (ruling that a three-month period, standing alone, is insufficient to establish causation); *Proctor*, 502 F.3d at 1208 (holding that “four months is too large a time gap to establish a causal connection”); *Argo v. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Kansas, Inc.*, 452 F.3d 1193, 1202 (10th Cir. 2006) (holding that twenty-four days was enough to allow an inference of causal connection). Evidence proffered to strengthen causal connection over longer periods may also be used to establish that the defendant’s reasons for adverse action are pretext. *See Proctor*, 502 F.3d at 1209; *Wells v. Colo. Dep't of Transp.*, 325 F.3d 1205, 1218 (10th Cir.2003) (considering evidence of pretext in analyzing the causation element of a prima facie case of retaliation under Title VII).

There is a causal connection between the protected activity and the adverse action because two weeks is enough to support causal connection on its own, and the eleven week period also shows a causal connection with additional evidence. In *Ramirez v. Oklahoma Dep't of Mental Health*, 41 F.3d 584, 596 (10th Cir. 1994), a period of one and one half months between the protected activity and adverse employment action was enough to show causation. In *Argo v. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Kansas, Inc.*, 452 F.3d 1193, 1202 (10th Cir. 2006), twenty-four days was enough to establish that a causal connection may exist. Here only two weeks passed from the time of filing to Mr. Hernandez’s termination on January 24, 2017 showing a causal connection between the two events. In *Proctor v. United Parcel Serv.*, 502 F.3d 1200, 1209 (10th Cir. 2007), four months had passed between the protected action and adverse action and plaintiff was allowed to present additional evidence to support the causal connection. Here, the eleven weeks and two days that passed between Mr. Hernandez’s EEOC filing and the negative reference alone may not establish a causal connection, however evidence offered below shows SSS’s reasons for termination are pretext and strengthen the connection.

### SSS’s Reasons for Termination and the Negative Reference are Pretext Because They are Inconsistent and Do Not Suggest SSS Followed Policy, Thus Strengthening the Causal Connection Between the Protected Activity and Adverse Action.

If direct evidence is not available, retaliation may be proven with only circumstantial evidence. *Compare* *Proctor v. United Parcel Serv.*, 502 F.3d 1200, 1208 (10th Cir. 2007) (allowing plaintiff to establish a causal connection between filing of administrative charges and his discharged by evidence of circumstances), *with Morgan v. Hilti, Inc.*, 108 F.3d 1319, 1324 (10th Cir. 1997) (showing that plaintiff was not able to raise an inference of pretext because her employer had issued warnings about the consequences of poor attendance both before and after plaintiff filed the charge of discrimination). Pretext is established by evidence showing weaknesses, implausibilities, inconsistencies, or contradictions in the employer's explanation for its action that a reasonable factfinder could infer that the employer did not act for the asserted non-discriminatory reasons. *Morgan*, 108 F.3d at 1323. The inquiry is not whether the employer’s reasons were fair or correct, but whether the employer believed those reasons and acted in good faith. *Proctor*, 502 F.3d at 1211.

SSS alleges it terminated Mr. Hernandez because of missed work, poor team relationships, missed deadlines, however, these reasons are pretextual. R. at 7. In *Morgan v. Hilti, Inc.*, 108 F.3d 1319, 1324 (10th Cir. 1997) an employer’s reason for termination was noted to be non-pretextual because there had been oral and written warnings about the consequences of absentism, showing an extended and detailed discplinary process. In *Argo v. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Kansas, Inc.*, 452 F.3d 1193, 1203 (10th Cir. 2006), the plaintiff’s performance had declined for nearly a year, and received repeated warnings about tardiness and failing to perform work. Here, unlike *Argo* and *Morgan*, there has been no formal disciplinary incidents at any time. *Argo*, 452 F.3d at 1203; *Morgan*, 108 F.3d at 1324; R. at 13. Ms. Gryphon and Mr. Hernandez discussed his absences before his EEOC filing, but there were no consequences named for his behavior, or formal written warnings, which would show adhesion to policy and so the reasons for termination are pretextual. R. at 16.

In *Proctor v. United Parcel Serv.*, 502 F.3d 1200, 1211 (10th Cir. 2007), the Court suggests that a non-uniformly implemented termination policy would suggest pretext. Here, the Record holds no evidence of policy, however Mr. Hernandez has noticed other employees have been allowed to take time off for medical leave, and he was not able to be granted a modified schedule which raises a genuine issue of fact, which requires this issue to be remanded. R. at 11. In *O'Neal v. Ferguson Const. Co.,* 237 F.3d 1248, 1254 (10th Cir. 2001), the employer’s reason for adverse action was deem pretextual because it, claimed less work was available for the plaintiff and so reduced the plaintiff’s hours, however, other employees testified that other employees were not being sent home without work or having hours reduced, and that other employees wanted the plaintiff’s help. Here, like in *O’Neal*, SSS claims that the project was delayed because of Mr. Hernandez, however there was another similarly trained employee that could have helped with the project and resulted in the project being completed on time. 237 F.3d at 1254; R. at 12, 18.

Here, SSS claims that co-worker frustrated contributed to his termination, but Mr. Rosenburg noted Mr. Hernandez had strong attitude toward team work and relationship building. R. at 18 – 19.

[*SSS claims that Mr. Hernandez requested the week of 4 – 10, instead of 9 - 14. Both claim that it he requested the “following / next” week off. Seems strange for him not to take a calendar week off. This would make it seem like Mr. Hernandez missed more work than he did.* ]

These inconsistentcies show that SSS’s reasons for termination and negative reference of Mr. Hernandez are merely pretext, and strengthen the causal connection between his EEOC filing, and both adverse actions.

## SSS DRIMINATED AGAINST MR. HERNANDEZ BECAUSE IT HAD KNOWLEDGE OF HIS DISABILITY, HIS REQUEST FOR ACCOMMODATION WAS REASONABLE AND WAS DENIED, AND WOULD NOT HAVE IMPOSED UNDUE HARDSHIP.

Under the ADA, discrimination occurs if an employer fails to grant a reasonable accommodation to an otherwise qualified individual with disability, unless the employer can show that accommodation would impose an undue hardship. 42 U.S.C. § 12112(b)(5)(A). Under the ADA, to establish a prima facie case of disability discrimination for the failure to accommodate a request for reasonable accommodations, a plaintiff must show that (1) he is a disabled person as defined by the ADA and Defendant knew of his disability; (2) the accommodations he requested and was denied were reasonable; and (3) the accommodations would pose no undue hardship on Defendant’s business operations. 42 U.S.C. § 12112(b). The Court has used several different standards for what a plaintiff must establish for a prima facie case of failure to reasonably accommodate claims. *Selk v. Brigham Young Univ.*, No. 2:13-CV-00326-CW, 2015 WL 150250, at \*5 (D. Utah Jan. 12, 2015). The different tests vary, but generally require a plaintiff to show the following: (1) she is disabled; (2) she is otherwise qualified; and (3) she requested a plausibly reasonable accommodation. *Compare Punt v. Kelly Servs.*, 862 F.3d 1040, 1050 (10th Cir. 2017), and *Sanchez v. Vilsack*, 695 F.3d 1174, 1176 (10th Cir. 2012), *with* *Spielman v. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Kansas, Inc.*, 33 F. App'x 439, 443 (10th Cir. 2002), *and* Allen v. SouthCrest Hosp., 455 Fed. Appx. 827, 834 (10th Cir. 2011). Once a plaintiff establishes a prima facie case, the burden shifts to the defendant to rebut one or more elements of the case or establish an affirmative defense such as undue hardship. *Punt*, 862 F.3d at 1050. Failure to accommodate does not require discriminatory intent. *Id.* Under any of the tests, it can be shown that SSS failed to accommodate Mr. Hernandez.

A qualified individual satisfies the requisite skill, experience, education and other job requirements. 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2(m). A two-part analysis is used to determine whether a person is qualified under the ADA: (1) the court determines whether the individual can perform the essential functions of the job; and (2) if (and only if) the individual cannot, the Court must determine whether any reasonable accommodation by the employer would allow the employee to perform those functions. *Davidson v. Am. Online, Inc.*, 337 F.3d 1179, 1190 (10th Cir. 2003) (finding a genuine issue of material fact whether “voicephone” experience was essential function of non-voice phone positions). Here, Mr. Hernandez has strong analytical abilities, was an important member of a team, and worked in his position for two years, showing SSS believed him to be qualified and capable of performing the essential functions of his position and is not at issue here.

### Mr. Hernandez Is Disabled Because Normal Cell Growth, Seeing, Concentrating, and Interacting with Others Are Major Life Activities That Are Impaired by Cancer, and SSS Had Knowledge of These Impairments as He Told His Supervisor About Them and His Potential Diagnosis.

A disability is a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities”, including normal cell growth, seeing, concentrating, interacting with others, and working. 42 U.S.C. §12102(1)(A), (2)(B); 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2(h)(1). In bringing a prima facie case, employees must show substantial limitations on major life activities, but not inabilities. Albertson's, Inc. v. Kirkingburg, 527 U.S. 555, 565 (1999) (holding that vision that was effectively monocular was a substantial limitation). Three factors are considered when determining a substantially limited impairment: (1) its nature and severity, (2) how long it will last or is expected to last, and (3) its permanent or long-term impact or expected impact. 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2(j)(2); *Dutton v. Johnson Cty. Bd. of Cty. Comm'rs*, 859 F. Supp. 498, 506 (D. Kan. 1994). Cancer substantially limits normal cell growth, even in remission. 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2 (j)(1)(vii) & (3)(iii). Employers must know of the disability to accommodate it. 29 C.F.R. § 1630.9(a); *Spielman*, 33 F. App'x at 441 – 43(ruling that a request for intermittent leave for scleroderma for doctor appointments and testing was sufficient give employer knowledge); *Freadman v. Metro. Prop. & Cas. Ins. Co*., 484 F.3d 91, 103 (1st Cir. 2007)(holding that a request to take time off because the employee was starting to not feel well was not sufficient for the employer to know it was referring to employee’s disability). The First Circuit holds employees may show the employer knew or should have known the request was for disability. *Id.*

Mr. Hernadez’s disability substantially limits normal cell growth, affects his ability to see and concentrate due to severe migraines, of which SSS had notice. In *Sanchez v. Vilsack*, 695 F.3d 1174, 1179 (10th Cir. 2012), plaintiff’s field of vision had been reduced by half after an accident and was ruled as substantially limiting and therefore a disability. Here, like in *Sanchez*, Mr. Hernandez’s neuro glioblastoma directly affects his vision, causing blurred vision and migraines which impair is ability to see. 695 F.3d at 1179. In *Dutton v. Johnson Cty. Bd. of Cty. Comm'rs*, 859 F. Supp. 498, 506 (D. Kan. 1994), summary judgment was denied because defendant was unable to establish genuine issue of material fact to show that the plaintiff was not disabled when the plaintiff suffered intermittent severe and debilitating headaches, which prevented the plaintiff from driving or doing normal everyday tasks. Here, like in *Dutton*,Mr. Hernandez suffers similarly debilitating migraines as a direct result of his cancer, that caused him to pause his legal education and be unable to work, and so the summary judgement of the lower court was inappropriate. 859 F. Supp. At 506.

In *Spielman v. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Kansas, Inc.*, 33 F. App'x 439, 443 (10th Cir. 2002), the employee requested intermittent time off for doctor’s appointments and testing for her scleroderma, an autoimmune disease and it was ruled as sufficient notice. Here, Mr. Hernandez requested a modified schedule, told of an upcoming doctor’s appointment, his severe symptoms and that he may have cancer, which is sufficient to put SSS on notice for his disability.

Told them he might have cancer, they didn’t know till the suit.

### Mr. Hernandez’s Request for a Modified Schedule Was a Plausibly Reasonable Request for Accommodations Because He Told His Employer of His Symptoms, Possible Diagnosis and Future Medical Appointments, Being as Specific as He Was Able.

Reasonable accommodations presently, or in the near future, enable an employee to perform essential functions of his job. *Cisneros v. Wilson*, 226 F.3d 1113, 1129 – 30 (10th Cir. 2000) overruled on other grounds by [Bd. of Trustees of Univ. of Alabama v. Garrett, 531 U.S. 356 (2001)](https://1.next.westlaw.com/Link/Document/FullText?findType=Y&serNum=2001172281&pubNum=708&originatingDoc=I92956d9b567e11e1b1bac17b569b34b6&refType=RP&originationContext=document&transitionType=DocumentItem&contextData=(sc.Search)); *Hennagir*, 587 F.3d at 1264. Reasonable accommodations may include modified work schedules, reassignment, or modification of equipment. 42 U.S.C. § 12111(9); *Carter v. Pathfinder Energy Servs., Inc.*, 662 F.3d 1134, 1146 (10th Cir. 2011) (finding a part time work schedule could be a reasonable accommodation because it allowed the employee to arguably complete the essential functions of his job). Accommodations are only deemed reasonable if they are needed because of the disability. *Punt*, 862 F.3d at 1050. A request to be relieved of an essential function of a position is not a reasonable accommodation. *Mason v. Avaya Commc'ns, Inc.*, 357 F.3d 1114, 1123 – 24 (10th Cir. 2004) (stating that as attendance is essential at most jobs, a request to work from home is unreasonable).

To determine appropriate accommodations, it may be necessary for the employer to initiate an interactive process with the disabled employee, identifying the precise limitations and potential reasonable accommodations. 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2(o)(3). This process should begin with the employee providing notice to the employer of the disability and any resulting limitations. *Smith*, 180 F.3d at 1171. A request for accommodation must be direct and specific enough to give the employer notice that the employee needs a special accommodation; no particular language is required. *Foster*, 830 F.3d at 1188 (ruling a request with a specific date and stating its purpose was to schedule surgery was sufficient to be a request for accommodation); *Smith*, 180 F.3d at 1172 (finding that no magic words are required; an employee need not mention the ADA or reasonable accommodations); *Freadman*,484 F.3d at 102 (finding a request to take time off because the employee was “starting not to feel well” not sufficiently specific). An employee is required to inform the employer of the “*expected duration of the impairment* (not the duration of the leave request).” *Cisneros*, 226 F.3d at 1129 – 30.

Mr. Hernandez’s request for a modified schedule was a reasonable request for accommodation because he engaged SSS about his needs was as specific as he was able to be. In *Carter v. Pathfinder Energy Servs., Inc.*, 662 F.3d 1134, 1146 (10th Cir. 2011) a request for part time work to rest from long shifts was ruled as a reasonable accommodation. Here, Mr. Hernandez requests not to be excused from his work, but to be able to work when he is able, whether that is morning or night his requested accommodation is less burdensome to his employer than in *Carter*, and so should be ruled as reasonable. 662 F.3d at 1146. In *Selk v. Brigham Young Univ.*, No. 2:13-CV-00326-CW, 2015 WL 150250, at \*6 (D. Utah Jan. 12, 2015), the employee and employer entered into a good faith interactive process when the employee approach the employer with his request, and then again when the previous accommodation was no longer available. Here, unlike *Selk*, SSS did not allow the interactive process to take place because it refused to consider accommodations without specifics, which Mr. Hernandez was unable to give at that time, nor potentially ever give, as the duration of cancer and manifestation of its symptoms cannot be foretold. 2015 WL 150250 at \*6.

In *Freadman v. Metro. Prop. & Cas. Ins. Co*., 484 F.3d 91, 103 (1st Cir. 2007), an employee told her direct supervisor that she “needed to take some time off because [she was] starting not to feel well” and was ruled insufficient because she did not say when she would need time off. In *Foster v. Mountain Coal Co., LLC*, 830 F.3d 1178, 1189 (10th Cir. 2016), Foster told his employer, Mountain Coal, that he had an appointment the next day to schedule an imminent surgery. Here, unlike *Freadman* and like *Foster*, Mr. Hernandez has been specific, notifying his employer of his upcoming appointment and immediate symptoms, being as specific as he was able. *Freadman*, 484 F.3d at 103; *Foster*, 830 F.3d at 1189.

### Mr. Hernandez’s Request for A Modified Schedule Would Not Have Caused Undue Burden on SSS Because There Was an Employee of Similar Skill and Education That Could Have Covered Mr. Hernandez’s Duties, and Mr. Hernandez Believed He Could Finish His Work with the Modified Schedule.

EEOC Regulations allow a defendant to show that a requested accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the defendant’s business. 29 C.F.R. § 1630.15(d). Undue hardship requires significant difficulty or expense and must be considered in light of an employer’s resources, size, nature and cost of the accommodation, and the impact of the accommodation. 42 U.S.C. § 12111(10)(A) & (B). The employer bears the burden of persuasion on whether an accommodation would impose undue hardship. *Rascon v. US W. Commc'ns, Inc.*, 143 F.3d 1324, 1334 (10th Cir. 1998) (holding an extended leave with the employee’s duties covered by others did not cause undue hardship) overruled on other grounds by [New Hampshire v. Maine, 532 U.S. 742 (2001)](https://1.next.westlaw.com/Link/Document/FullText?findType=Y&serNum=2001440935&pubNum=0000708&originatingDoc=Ic4321a84e77311e3b4bafa136b480ad2&refType=RP&originationContext=document&transitionType=DocumentItem&contextData=(sc.Search)).

The reasonable accommodations requested by Mr. Hernandez would not cause undue hardship because there was an employee suitable to assist in covering his duties, and the modified schedule would have allowed Mr. Hernandez to finish his work on time. In *Rascon v. US W. Commc'ns, Inc.*, 143 F.3d 1324, 1334 (10th Cir. 1998), the employer argued that the leave it granted its employee, Rascon, was extraordinary accommodation that it had provided with difficulty because other employees had to cover Rascon’s responsibilities, however the leave was less accommodating that than company policy required. The Court held that co-workers covering the duties for Mr. Rascon for a period of several months was not undue hardship. *Id.* at 1335. Here, there is no evidence of a policy for medical leave in the Record, but Mr. Hernandez believes he has seen other employees take medical issues and parental leave, which suggests a genuine issue of material fact, requiring remand. R. at 11. SSS also contends that it believed Mr. Hernandez was the only employee capable of performing his tasks and blames him delays in the project. R. at 17 – 18. However here, like *Rascon*, another employee, Joey Piper, has the same education and training as Mr. Hernandez and would have been able to take Mr. Hernandez’s place on the project, allowing Mr. Hernandez’s duties to be covered without hardship. 143 F.3d 1334; R. at 12. In *Dutton v. Johnson Cty. Bd. of Cty. Comm'rs*, 859 F. Supp. 498, 506 (D. Kan. 1994), the employer was not able to produce evidence showing that the employee’s absences resulted in essential work not be completed in a timely manner. Here, unlike *Dutton*, SSS may point to the delays in its project, however these delays may have been avoided if SSS had allowed Mr. Hernandez a modified schedule, as he was almost done with his work at the time of his termination. R. at 12, 18.

# CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Appellant requests that summary judgement be reversed.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: March 25, 2018 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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# CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

I certify that

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# CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this date, the 26 of March, 2018, a copy of the foregoing Brief for Appellant was served on opposing counsel via email

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