

Differential Treatment of Older Workers Due to COVID-19 Accommodations: Potential Issues of Ageism and Age Discrimination

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the implications of employers' current COVID-19 protective workplace attendance policies toward older workers, potentially creating the outcomes of increased numbers of involuntary retirees and the discouraged older worker syndrome among otherwise qualified older workforce participants. How potential ageist assumptions and age discrimination under COVID-19 affect workplace decisions in reflection on the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act* (1967) guidelines is discussed. Older workers may remain in the workforce longer than ever before due to having extended life expectancies. Workplace policies need to be increasingly sensitive to older employees' rights to sustain their workplace engagement (Cummins, 2014; Cummins, Harootyan, & Kunkel, 2015). The author reviewed current unemployment trends in 2020 and emerging litigation in reflection upon general issues of COVID-19 related age discrimination. Specifically, older workers' workplace attendance decisions by employers were analyzed within the historical framework of the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act* (1967 significant amendments in 1978 and 1986). The policy analysis paper presents the implications of employers' COVID-19 protective policies on older workers and how it may affect the "health" of the workplace and older adults and the economy beyond the pandemic. Lastly, strategies to address an "age-friendly" workplace during a pandemic and post-pandemic are discussed.

Keywords: COVID-19 workplace policy, ageism, age discrimina-

tion, Age Discrimination in Employment Act, discouraged worker

Trato diferencial de los trabajadores mayores debido a las adaptaciones de COVID-19: Posibles problemas de discriminación por edad y discriminación por edad

RESUMEN

Este documento examina las implicaciones de las políticas de asistencia laboral de protección COVID-19 actuales de los empleadores hacia los trabajadores mayores, lo que podría generar los resultados de un mayor número de jubilados involuntarios y el síndrome del trabajador mayor desanimado entre los participantes mayores de la fuerza laboral calificados. Se discute cómo los supuestos potenciales de discriminación por edad y la discriminación por edad bajo COVID-19 afectan las decisiones en el lugar de trabajo en la reflexión sobre las pautas de la Ley de Discriminación por Edad en el Empleo (1967). Los trabajadores mayores pueden permanecer en la fuerza laboral más tiempo que nunca debido a que tienen una mayor esperanza de vida. Las políticas del lugar de trabajo deben ser cada vez más sensibles a los derechos de los empleados mayores de mantener su compromiso en el lugar de trabajo (Cummins, 2014; Cummins, Harootyan y Kunkel, 2015). El autor revisó las tendencias actuales del desempleo en 2020 y los litigios emergentes en una reflexión sobre los problemas generales de la discriminación por edad relacionada con COVID-19. Específicamente, las decisiones de los empleadores sobre la asistencia al lugar de trabajo de los trabajadores mayores se analizaron dentro del marco histórico de la Ley de discriminación por edad en el empleo (1967 enmiendas significativas en 1978 y 1986). El documento de análisis de políticas presenta las implicaciones de las políticas de protección de COVID-19 de los empleadores en los trabajadores mayores y cómo puede afectar la “salud” del lugar de trabajo y los adultos mayores y la economía más allá de la pandemia. Por último, se discuten las estrategias para abordar un lugar de trabajo “amigable para las personas mayores” durante una pandemia y una post-pandemia.

Palabras clave: Política laboral COVID-19, discriminación por edad, discriminación por edad, Ley de discriminación por edad en el empleo, trabajador desalentado

老年员工因2019冠状病毒病适应措施而面临的差别对待：年龄主义和年龄歧视的潜在问题

摘要

本文分析了雇主当前的2019冠状病毒病（COVID-19）保护性职场出勤政策对老年员工产生的意义，这些政策潜在产生的结果则是，非自愿退休员工数量的增加和合格老年劳动力面临的老年员工综合征。在反思1967年《禁止就业年龄歧视法》指南的过程中探讨了COVID-19情境下潜在的年龄主义假设和年龄歧视如何影响职场决策。鉴于寿命预期时间的延长，老年人可能比以往任何时刻都能更长的保留在劳动力市场中。职场政策需越来越对老年员工的权利保持敏感，以期维持其职场参与（Cummins, 2014; Cummins, Harootyan, & Kunkel, 2015）。作者审视了2020年的失业趋势和新兴诉讼，后者反映了与COVID-19相关的年龄歧视的一般性问题。具体而言，在1967年《禁止就业年龄歧视法》（1978和1986年增添了重大修正案）这一历史框架下分析了雇主针对老年员工的职场出勤决策。本篇政策分析提出了雇主针对老年员工的COVID-19保护性政策的意义，以及这些政策可能如何影响超出大流行之外的职场“健康”、老年人以及经济。最后，探讨了大流行期间和大流行后期用于应对“老年友好型”职场的策略。

关键词：COVID-19职场政策，年龄主义，年龄歧视，《禁止就业年龄歧视法》，灰心的员工

Introduction

The recent pandemic has had a significant impact on older workers and their quality of life in many ways (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Kanfer, Lyndgaard, & Tatel, 2020). Many older workers have encountered age discrimination issues during the pandemic despite the ADEA legislation's coverage (Button, 2020). There is a valid concern that COVID-19

policies at the state and local levels discriminate against vulnerable worker groups in the form of racism and other biases (Hooper, Nápoles, & Pérez-Stable, 2020). Under COVID-19, employers may choose or retain younger workers over older qualified workers based upon ageist assumptions of both vulnerabilities (e.g., health) and job-related capabilities (Ventrell-Monsees, 2020). It is essential to examine the public policy issues impacting economically vul-

nerable workers, such as older workers who typically do not fare well during a recession (Bui, Button, & Picciotti, 2020; Kaminer, 2020). This paper aims to examine general issues of COVID-19 related age discrimination in workplace attendance by reviewing employment data trends in 2020 for older workers.

Relevant employment legislation is applied to public policy (*Age Discrimination in Employment Act* (Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), 29 U.S.C. § 621 to 29 U.S.C. § 634) with significant amendments in 1978 and 1986. Emerging legal cases exposing employers' recent trends in responding to older workers and the associated Discouraged Worker Syndrome during COVID-19 are discussed. The paper will conclude with strategies to create a shifting paradigm of a workplace policy that avoids ageist and potentially discriminatory "paternalistic" employer responses toward qualified older workers during a pandemic and beyond.

Why do we expect an interaction between COVID-19 and differential treatment for older workers? Recent employment trends in 2020 due to the pandemic show a different negative impact on older workers (Terrell, 2020). According to Terrell in an AARP article, "During the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers age 55 and older were 17 percent more likely to lose their jobs than employees who were just a few years younger." For the first time in 50 years, workers aged 55 and older have lost their jobs faster than younger workers (Terrell, 2020). A

recent study report concluded that the pandemic's impact had created a recession, unlike in recent decades (Papadopoulos et al., 2020). Its impact is believed to be forcing early involuntary retirement for many qualified older workers (Munnell, 2020). There is the need to reduce barriers to employment for qualified older adults who could meaningfully contribute to the workplace and the broader society (Duncan, 2003; Moench, March 15, 2020; Stypińska & Nikander, 2018). Further, older workers may be engaged in extended work-family role obligations in supporting multiple generations that further underscore the need to remain in the workforce (Allen & Finklestein, 2014; Beier, 2015).

Is there a linkage between this retirement trend during the pandemic and age discrimination in the workplace? In a recent *Forbes* magazine article, Weller (December 19, 2020) discussed these two factors' possible intersection. Weller suggested that some employers may be discriminatory in their employment decision-making with older workers because of a perceived health vulnerability to COVID-19 for this group, especially if a job involves engaging with the public. Further, older workers may be discriminated against in remote work because of ageist stereotypes regarding older adults and technology skills. Subsequently, older workers may be discouraged from seeking other employment opportunities (Ayalon et al., 2020; Weller, December 19, 2020).

According to Monahan et al. (2020), paternalistic responses in the

workplace toward older workers may have the misguided intention of being “proactive” in nature (i.e., workplace policies to protect older adults from contracting COVID-19). Still, they can inadvertently cause adverse health outcomes (e.g., social isolation) and promote ageist stereotypes. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), differential treatment of older workers is a concern during the current pandemic. In a 2020 EEOC statement (June 11, 2020), “[t]he *Age Discrimination in Employment Act* (ADEA) enacted in 1967 with significant amendments in 1974, 1978 and 1986 prohibits employment discrimination against individuals age 40 and older. The ADEA prohibits a covered employer from voluntarily excluding an individual from the workplace based on being 65 or older. This rule is true even if the employer acted for benevolent reasons such as protecting the employee due to higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19” (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), June 11, 2020). Before proceeding, it is essential to define the terms of “ageism” and “age discrimination.”

Ageism and Age Discrimination Defined

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines “ageism” as the differential treatment of individuals or groups due to their age and involves both stereotyping and discrimination. According to WHO, “it can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, or institutional policies and

practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs” (World Health Organization (WHO), November 2, 2020). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines “age discrimination” as engaging in behaviors that differentially treat an employee or job applicant because of their age group membership. According to the EEOC, “[a]n employment policy or practice that applies to everyone, regardless of age, can be illegal if it hurts applicants or employees age 40 or older and is not based on a ‘reasonable factor other than age’ (RFOA)” (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), June 21, 2020).

Workforce Engagement in 2020 for Older Workers

Attitudes toward older workers’ workplace attendance have shown positive reactions from older adults and employers in recent years. The percentage of older workers expressing an interest in remaining in the workforce past the traditional retirement age has changed from 18 to 45 percent (Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2019). Also, recently surveyed employers regard older workers as more productive than younger workers (Munnell & Wettstein, 2020).

With these positive attitudes in mind, what has been the impact of COVID-19 on older workers’ intended workforce engagement? One index is the unemployment rate of different groups. Unemployment rates have been disproportionately higher for workers

ages 65 or older (15.43%) in comparison to younger workers between ages 25 to 44 (12.99%) in April 2020, and women have shown higher unemployment trends across all age groups during the same time (Bui et al., 2020).

Employers' Paternalistic Responses toward Older Workers in a Pandemic

Past research has suggested that employers may have ageist stereotypes affecting their decision-making with older workers (Ng & Feldman, 2012; Nilsson, 2018; Voss, Bodner, & Rothermund, 2018). These possible ageism attitudes and associated discriminatory policies are only exacerbated by pandemic workplace conditions (Aronson, 2020). Meisner (2020) suggested that recent social media messaging during COV-19 has shown increasing evidence of ageist attitudes and intergenerational tensions from younger generations toward older generations, creating issues of undervaluing older adults in society. Ageist stereotypes by employers can have a detrimental effect on older workers' well-being and economic "thriving" (Lamont, Swift, & Abrams, 2015). Public policy's intent of protecting older adults from the detrimental effects of the ongoing pandemic may be causing increased social isolation from social distancing, creating more mental and physical health detriments for aging adults (Morley & Vellas, 2020).

Ehni and Wahl (2020) purport that public policies in response to COVID-19 have revealed severe ageism and age discrimination in society.

In response to these concerns, the authors proposed six statements to combat this trend and restore older adults' fair treatment. First, "older adults are highly heterogeneous [and] their health and functioning are better than negative stereotypes suggest." Second, "age limits for intensive care and other forms of medical care are inappropriate and unethical." Third, "mass deficit views of old age are dangerous to older citizens and societies at large, intergenerational solidarity must be strengthened." Fourth, "resisting the assumption of a paternalistic attitude toward older adults in the crisis is important." Fifth, "the COVID-19 crisis demands fostering the use of modern information and communication technologies among older adults." Finally, "the COVID-19 crisis not only demands the best of virology but also the best of gerontology for policy guidance and understanding the consequences of the crisis at large." An ethical society needs to create and enforce public policies to best support older adults' quality of life (Morrow-Howell, Galucia, & Swinford, 2020). Employers regarding older workers as assets and long-term workers necessitate an attitude shift from disability to workplace health promotion and wellness programs (Magnavita, 2017).

Emerging Legal Cases from the Pandemic

A recent U.S. Senate report indicated that the unemployment rate for older workers aged 55 and older changed from 2.6 percent (February 2020) to

13.6 percent (April 2020) (Casey, 2020). This dramatic increase belies the need to understand potential age discrimination in the workplace, causing an increase in cases over recent years (von Schrader & Nazarov, 2016). There is evidence that potential lawsuit cases are emerging in response to older workers' treatment during the pandemic (Agovino, July 18, 2020). Here are the details of an example age discrimination case during the time of COVID-19:

Mark Kanyuk, 62, sued Shearman & Sterling, saying the law firm needed to cut costs due to COVID-19 and started by laying off one of its oldest employees. Kanyuk alleged his co-workers joked about his age and that the firm fabricated a story about him accepting kickbacks to justify his dismissal. The firm denied the allegations and said he was terminated for cause. (Agovino, July 18, 2020)

According to Agovino, interviewed lawyers purported that there will soon be a rise in paternalistic lawsuits due to the pandemic. The author explained, “[t]hese cases stem from companies violating the law by taking well-meaning actions to protect older workers from contracting the virus. For example, a company may believe that it is helping a 60-year-old by furloughing that worker to keep them from interacting with others who could potentially have the virus. However, that is against the law.”

Displaced older jobseekers encountering multiple obstacles may decide to enter early retirement, settle

for a job they are overqualified for, or accept lower pay than they need (Marmora & Ritter, 2015). They may experience low self-efficacy feelings in the job search process, need to rely on their pension for financial survival prematurely, be depressed, feel socially isolated, and overall psychological tension in response to the process (Finnie & Gray, 2018). Workplaces and community outreach programs for older adults need to offer training opportunities in interviewing, job-seeking techniques, and general job training skill updating to make them more viable as job applicants in the workforce and reduce their career vulnerability (Madero-Cabib, 2015; Rix, 1996).

Discouraged Worker Syndrome during COVID-19

Who is a discouraged worker? The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (September 2020a) defines a “discouraged worker” as an unemployed individual who has sought employment during the past 12 months or since the termination of their job within the past 12 months. Further, the discouraged worker has ceased seeking employment because they believe that they are not qualified for available jobs or have no relevant job positions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2020a). As we live longer than previous generations on average, this will meaningfully extend the proportion of our lives spent in the workforce. The planning of successive careers and remaining competent within our fields/occupations are critical for us to successfully “age-in-place” in the

workplace, and it should begin as soon as we enter the workforce (Müller et al., 2018).

Over weeks or more extended periods to seek employment, the discouraged older adult may merely exit the workforce and enter involuntary retirement with limited financial resources (Ichino et al., 2017). There is a concern that age discrimination in workplace policies may discourage older workers and cause many older adults to enter retirement before they wished or should have retired involuntarily. Job loss can have a significant negative impact on their mental and physical health and their ability to sustain the quality of living standards (Lassus, Lopez, & Roscigno, 2015).

In a pre-pandemic work context, work stress affects older workers' motivation to remain in the organization (Fleischmann et al., 2013). Employers need to be sensitive to intensified mental health issues for all employees in this time of COVID-19 (Duan & Zhu, 2020). Still, this effect is complicated for qualified older workers encountering more protective "barriers" than workplace engagement opportunities. Further exacerbating this issue, these ageist attitudes and discriminatory behaviors of employers may become internalized for older workers and can change their attitudes and behaviors ("self-fulfilling prophecy") (Rudolph & Zacher, 2020). Older adults may also internalize these multiple biases and ageist attitudes, creating issues of non-adaptive, skewed subjective age ("internalized ageism;" Morrow-Howell et al., 2020).

Berg-Weger and Morley (2020) cautioned that one of these critical outcomes is the social isolation and related "loneliness epidemic." This social isolation can lead to debilitating feelings of anxiety and depression, exacerbating older adults' mental health difficulties during a pandemic (Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Brooke & Jackson, 2020; Cohen-Mansfield et al., 2016). Further, older adults in low- to mid-level income regions of the world can experience even greater marginalization and discrimination (Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2020).

This situation is not only an older worker's workplace policy issue but, instead, it is a broader societal issue. There is the concern that this current, and possibly predominantly involuntary, U.S. retirement trend will significantly impact both older adults' physical and mental health and financial security. Recent publications have argued for public policy reforms. Ideas have ranged from targeted paid sick leave and Medicare age qualification change for older workers during the pandemic (Ghilarducci, 2020a; Ghilarducci & Farmand, 2020) to general changes Social Security system to protect better the economically vulnerable (Ghilarducci, 2020b). Efforts to retain qualified workers yield benefits for all key stakeholders, ranging from heightened organizational commitment to increased work satisfaction (Fyock, 2005; Taylor, Shultz, & Doverspike, 2005). The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) purported that age discrimination has a detrimental impact on both older workers and the economy, citing research projecting economic losses due

to age discrimination could reach \$3.9 trillion by 2050 (AARP, 2020a). During a pandemic and beyond, employers and their workforce public policies need to support qualified older workers to sustain workforce engagement for the benefit of all society (AARP, 2020b).

It is critical for employers and all organizational representatives to have a realistic understanding of aging workers' capabilities over time and avoid reliance upon ageist assumptions (Reio & Sanders-Reio, 1999). Creating an "age-friendly" working environment is crucial for many different workplace initiatives (e.g., offering bridge employment opportunities for retirees; Rau & Adams, 2005), especially during a pandemic. Interestingly, a recent meta-analysis by Romero Starke and colleagues (2020) suggested that age per se is not a significant predictive factor in determining COVID-19 infection vulnerability after adjusting for "age-dependent" risk factors (e.g., compromised immunity). This fact needs to be considered when implementing age-related preventative policies such as age-dependent work restrictions (Romero Starke et al., 2020). Further, workplace policies need to address better issues of older adults who do not have access to job training resources (e.g., technology training) and are vulnerable due to physical or economic issues (Halvorsen & Yulikova, 2020). Policies regarding "active aging" and retention of qualified aging workers must better ensure that older adults needing job training are given skill updating opportunities (Johnson et al., 2020; McPhee & Schlosser, 2015).

"Jeopardy" Issues for Older Workers: Considerations during a Pandemic Workplace

The combined effect of two potential bias factors, such as age and race, creates "double jeopardy" in responding to older adults in society (Garcia et al., 2020). For example, Chatters and colleagues (2020) examined this issue with older Black adults during the pandemic. They concluded that being both older and black was associated with practices and policies that elevated the risk for discrimination. Applied to the workplace during the pandemic, an analysis of older Black and Hispanic workers' overall unemployment rates in August 2020 indicated a disproportionate impact on older White workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2020b).

Gender and age are equally of concern for potential double jeopardy in the workplace. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2020, older women aged 55 and older showed higher average unemployment trends from April through December 2020 than combined statistics for their age group. The unemployment numbers for older women workers did reduce after a significant spike (15.4%) in April, but that may be due to older women exiting the workforce in response to a lack of employment opportunities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2020). It is vital to explore combined issues of older adult identity in understanding potential biases (e.g., "gendered ageism;" Spedale, 2018; Spedale, Coupland, & Tempest, 2014). There are serious eco-

conomic issues for older adults, like aging women, who live longer and handle multiple financial demands necessitating continued workplace attendance (Paz, Doron, & Tur-Sinai, 2018).

McGregor (2018) purports that older women workers can experience bias by age, gender, and race, or ethnicity (“triple jeopardy”) in the workplace when they should be valued for their work experience and diversity characteristics. For older cohorts of women, their disrupted or nonexistent workforce participation in their younger life stages created a lack of opportunities to enter the workplace in their middle or later adulthood. They may have to face double jeopardy in biased organizational treatment to be a woman and an older adult (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). This situation can result in the “feminization of poverty” (Pearce, 1978) for many older women in today’s society because they also may lack financial and social support in their later years due to death or divorce (Rix, 1996). Additionally, even if not in a pandemic, older women successfully entering for the first time or re-entering the workforce have limited opportunities and lower earnings typically (Rix, 1996). These workforce engagement issues appear to be exacerbated by the current pandemic, according to recent 2020 unemployment data (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2020).

Ageist Workplace Harassment and a Hostile Work Environment under COVID-19

Relevant to ageism concerns related to employers’ COVID-19 attendance

policies, age discrimination pertains to harassment in the workplace and a hostile work environment that might impel the older worker to leave (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), June 21, 2020). Harassment in the workplace may be a part of ageist COVID-19 employment policies but could be hard to prove. Over the decades, there have been fluctuations in the number of age discrimination cases filed by older adults. The evidence to prove an age discrimination case has become more daunting in Supreme Court rulings (Hardy, 2006).

More progress is needed to protect the workplace attendance rights of qualified older workers. On January 15, 2020, the House voted 261-155 in favor of H.R. 1230, the *Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act (POWADA)* (H.R.1230, 2020). The POWADA bill supports older workers’ rights in filing age discrimination complaints by permitting “... a complaining party to rely on any type or form of admissible evidence, which needs only be sufficient for a reasonable trier of fact to find that an unlawful practice occurred.” Further, the POWADA bill supports that “... a complaining party shall not be required to demonstrate that age or retaliation was the sole cause of the employment practice.” These two aims reject the Supreme Court’s decision in *Gross v. FBL Financial Services, Inc.* that requires a complainant to prove that the employer’s decision was based on the ‘but-for’ cause of age (Congress.gov, 2020). Unfortunately, there has been a lack of support for further passage of the act in the U.S. Senate and the White House

(GovTrack.us, 2020; Smith, 2020), and this further belies the need to address employer strategies to support and protect an aging workforce.

Strategies for Older Adults’ Workforce Engagement during a Pandemic (and Beyond)

Reducing ageism has both a societal and personal health benefit for older adults (Levy et al., 2020). According to Marchiondo, Gonzales, and Williams (2019), the “wear and tear” effects of perceived workplace age discrimination on older workers’ mental and overall health are significant. Public policies must reduce age discrimination to support both older workers’ long-term workforce engagement and overall health. Workplace policies targeting older workers for workforce reduction due to COVID-19 can have long-lasting effects on employers’ attitudes toward the value of retaining older workers and the ability of the aging worker to find new employment opportunities (Morrow-Howell & Gonzales, 2020; Olson, August 7, 2017).

Employers’ attention needs to be shifted in focus on ways to create “age-friendly” work environments (Hardy, 2006; Harris et al., 2018; Sterns & Spokus, 2013). Employers should be examining workplace policies and promote workplace training to avoid stereotyping older workers as vulnerable (Loretto & White, 2006). Each worker and their job flexibility (e.g., ability to telecommute) should be judged on a case-by-case basis, instead of solely by employee age (Loretto & White, 2006).

Various employment services and public policies can support qualified older workers’ extended workforce engagement. Abraham and Houseman (2020) suggested that workplace policy reforms should focus on offering “targeted” job skill training opportunities, creating specific job placement resources, and having job centers with specialized staff trained on aging issues. Finally, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) reinstitute funding to support older disadvantaged adults seeking employment. The value of such policy initiatives goes beyond economic security for older adults. Zacher and colleagues (2018a, 2018b) purported that later-life work engagement should not only address one’s basic life needs but should elicit feelings of healthy aging, life satisfaction, and personal fulfillment in the workplace. Fair employment policies are needed to achieve and sustain older workers’ workforce participation and their feelings of occupational well-being (Cleveland & Hanscom, 2017).

Summary

“Age” needs to be taken out of workplace policies and practices (Roberts, 2006). Instead, workplace policies and practices should focus on older workers’ qualifications (Ilmarinen & Ilmarinen, 2015). It is hoped that such efforts will yield positive “aging-in-place” outcomes, even during a pandemic (Kooij, 2020).

The negative impact of the current pandemic on older workers ap-

pears to be further exacerbated by ageist stereotypes of older adults' capabilities (Meisner, 2020). There must be fair and equitable standards applied to all qualified employees regardless of age (e.g., COVID-19 testing protocols for all employees). Under the current pandemic and beyond, employment policies need to be more closely aligned with the legislative dictates under the enacted ADEA with amendments (1978, 1986). Employers must proactively address any barriers to workplace attendance, such as paternalistic discouragement due to COVID-19.

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