EMPLOYMENT

The Box That Isn't Supposed to Matter

How a federal contractor compliance form became a familiar feature of the American job application, and what its removal in 2026 does and does not change

Published September 4, 2026

By Accibly Editorial Team · 26 min read

Executive Summary

Near the end of many job applications sits a question employers are otherwise generally barred from asking before a job offer: do you have a disability? The question exists because of Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires federal contractors to take affirmative action for disabled workers, and Form CC-305, the mechanism regulators built to measure whether that promise was being kept. The form was designed as a wall: voluntary, confidential, and withheld from hiring decision makers, so disability could matter to systemic measurement without improperly entering an individual hiring decision. In 2026, the Department of Labor eliminated that measurement architecture, concluding it could not be reconciled with the ADA's own restrictions on disability inquiries, without establishing a replacement. This investigation traces that history and then looks past the checkbox itself, into resume screening, assessments, video interviews, and automated

> hiring tools, where disability can become relevant to a hiring outcome without anyone ever consulting the form.

The Question

The question appears near the end of countless job applications.

Do you have a disability?

Sometimes it arrives after pages of employment history. Sometimes it appears alongside questions about race, gender, veteran status, or other demographic information. The language may explain that answering is voluntary. It may say the information is confidential. It may reassure the applicant that refusing to answer will not result in adverse treatment.

For a disabled applicant, none of that necessarily makes the decision simple.

Select Yes, and you have disclosed something an employer ordinarily is not supposed to use against you.

Select No, and you have provided inaccurate information about yourself.

Select I don't wish to answer, and you may still wonder why the question was asked at all.

The question can feel especially strange because federal disability law generally restricts employers from asking applicants whether they have disabilities before making a conditional job offer.

So why does a disability question appear on job applications in the first place?

That question leads somewhere unexpected.

It leads back more than half a century, to an attempt by the federal government to solve one of disability employment policy's hardest problems.

It leads through the Rehabilitation Act, affirmative action, federal contractors, decades of regulatory experimentation, a government form known as CC-305, and eventually the software infrastructure used to recruit and hire workers.

And in 2026, the government that helped put the question there decided to dismantle much of the system behind it.

The history of this little box is really the history of a much larger contradiction.

How do you protect disabled applicants from being judged because they are disabled while simultaneously measuring whether disabled people are being given a fair opportunity to work?

For decades, the federal government tried to do both.

The box was part of the answer.

Now it is becoming part of the question.

Before the box, there was a promise

The story begins in 1973.

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act required certain companies doing business with the federal government to take affirmative action to employ and advance qualified individuals with disabilities.

That was a significant idea.

The obligation was not merely to avoid deliberately refusing to hire someone because of a disability. Federal contractors covered by the law were expected to take affirmative steps toward employment opportunity.

But that created a problem that would become increasingly important.

How do you know whether it is working?

Some disabilities are apparent. Many are not.

A company can count applicants. It can count hires. It can examine promotions and terminations. But if it does not know which people have disabilities, it cannot easily determine how disabled people are moving through those systems.

A contractor might have an affirmative action program on paper and still have very little quantitative information about whether disabled people were applying, being hired, remaining employed or advancing.

The government therefore needed information that employers ordinarily had good reasons not to collect.

That tension was embedded in the policy almost from the beginning.

The government began asking

Disability self identification did not suddenly appear in 2013.

Earlier Section 503 regulations already required covered contractors to invite certain individuals to identify themselves as having disabilities.

But the older architecture was substantially different from what many applicants eventually came to recognize.

The invitation generally occurred after an offer of employment but before the person began working.

That timing mattered.

By waiting until after the employment offer, the system attempted to separate information about disability from the decision about whether the person deserved the offer in the first place.

The government wanted the information for affirmative action.

It did not want disability status becoming a reason to reject an applicant.

That distinction would later become one of the central legal problems surrounding the entire system.

Then came the ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act added another powerful protection.

Before making a conditional job offer, employers generally may not ask an applicant whether the applicant has a disability or inquire into the nature or severity of a disability.

Employers can ask whether someone can perform job functions. They can describe the job and ask applicants to demonstrate or explain how they would perform it. There are also circumstances involving reasonable accommodation.

But the basic rule is deliberately restrictive.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has explained the historical reason for it: disability information was frequently used to exclude applicants before employers had evaluated their actual qualifications.

The law therefore tries to move the inquiry away from:

What is wrong with this person?

and toward:

Can this person perform the job?

That makes the later appearance of a disability question during the application process seem even stranger.

The answer lies in what happened next.

The government decided it could not measure what it could not see

By the early 2010s, the Department of Labor concluded that the Section 503 system was not producing enough information to evaluate whether affirmative action was succeeding.

The government could require outreach.

It could require affirmative action plans.

It could prohibit discrimination.

But without better applicant and workforce data, contractors and regulators had limited ability to determine whether disabled people were entering the hiring process and what happened to them afterward.

This was not merely an administrative inconvenience.

It was an accountability problem.

Imagine an employer saying:

We are committed to recruiting people with disabilities.

How many disabled people applied?

We don't know.

How many were hired?

We don't know.

Are disabled people represented in the workforce?

We don't really know.

Did the outreach program improve anything?

We cannot reliably measure that.

Affirmative action without measurement risked becoming an activity rather than an outcome.

So the Department of Labor changed the system.

2013 changed the meaning of the question

In 2013, the Department of Labor substantially revised the Section 503 regulations.

One of the most consequential changes was the expansion of disability self identification.

Covered contractors were required to invite applicants to voluntarily identify as individuals with disabilities during the pre offer stage.

They would invite people again after an offer.

Employees would also periodically receive opportunities to self identify.

The government standardized the process through Form CC-305.

And the new framework established a 7 percent utilization goal for individuals with disabilities.

The goal was not a quota.

A contractor falling below 7 percent was not automatically guilty of discrimination, nor was an employer required to hire an unqualified person simply to reach a number.

The goal was intended as a diagnostic.

If representation fell below the utilization goal, contractors were expected to examine their practices and determine whether impediments to equal employment opportunity existed.

That meant the government needed data.

And that meant someone had to ask the question.

What the box was actually for

This is the part that gets lost when an applicant encounters the form today.

The disability question was not designed to tell a hiring manager:

This applicant is disabled.

It was designed to help an organization and its regulator answer something closer to:

Are people with disabilities participating in this employment system?

CC-305 made that purpose unusually explicit.

The form explained that federal contractors and subcontractors were required to take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote and retain qualified people with disabilities.

It explained the utilization goal.

And it told people why the question was being asked.

The answer was supposed to be confidential.

The form told applicants and employees that people making employment decisions would not see the response.

That created a wall, at least by design.

On one side sat the hiring decision.

On the other sat disability demographic information intended for affirmative action measurement.

The box existed precisely because disability was supposed to matter to the measurement of systemic opportunity while not mattering improperly to the decision about an individual applicant.

That distinction is the key to understanding everything that followed.

Regulators knew people might not trust it

The architects of the system were not oblivious to the fear surrounding disclosure.

During the rulemaking process, concerns were raised about asking applicants with non apparent disabilities to identify themselves before receiving a job offer.

The problem was obvious.

A person might understand that the information was legally protected and still fear that disclosure could somehow hurt their chances.

Those fears are not irrational in a legal system whose restrictions on disability inquiries exist partly because disability information historically was used to exclude people from employment.

The regulatory architecture attempted to manage the contradiction through voluntariness, confidentiality and repeated opportunities to self identify.

Someone uncomfortable disclosing before an offer could decline.

Another opportunity could come later.

The system depended on trust.

And that created another measurement problem.

If people who fear discrimination decline to identify themselves, the data intended to measure disability opportunity can become incomplete.

The government was trying to count a population while promising that the information used to count that population would not be used to decide whether any individual belonged in the workplace.

That is a difficult system to design.

Then the government form became software

There is another part of this story that is easy to miss.

Government regulations do not remain inside the Federal Register.

Companies have to operationalize them.

For modern employers, that increasingly means software.

Recruiting platforms and human capital systems incorporated federal contractor compliance into the machinery of hiring.

Oracle Recruiting documentation, for example, has addressed the configuration of the federal disability self identification form within U.S. recruiting workflows.

SAP SuccessFactors incorporated the federal disability form into its compliance infrastructure.

Other recruiting systems have built similar functionality around federal contractor obligations, though not every platform's own implementation documentation was independently available to this investigation.

This is how regulation becomes an interface.

A statute becomes a regulation.

A regulation becomes a government form.

A government form becomes a software requirement.

The requirement becomes a configuration option.

The configuration option becomes another screen in the application process.

And eventually an applicant sees a checkbox without seeing the fifty years of policy underneath it.

One small detail from Oracle's documentation captures the relationship particularly well.

The platform can provide functionality associated with government compliance requirements while also warning customers that Oracle does not guarantee that using the functionality will itself ensure regulatory compliance.

That is the transformation in miniature.

Government policy has been productized.

But responsibility still belongs to the employer.

Did every company start asking?

This is where the investigation has to resist an attractive conclusion.

The disability question can feel nearly universal to someone who applies for many jobs.

That does not establish that most American companies adopted CC-305 or that employers without federal contractor obligations routinely copied the government's question.

The available evidence does not establish how common that practice is among employers not subject to Section 503.

That distinction matters.

Federal contracting touches a large and economically significant collection of employers. Large organizations can also contain different legal entities, establishments and contracting relationships. At the same time, major recruiting platforms made compliance workflows easier to deploy and maintain.

Those facts can make a federal compliance mechanism highly visible without proving that every employer asking a disability related demographic question is doing so for the same legal reason.

There are also circumstances in which employers may undertake lawful voluntary affirmative action efforts.

But prevalence cannot be inferred from familiarity.

The more defensible finding is narrower and more interesting:

A federal affirmative action requirement became sufficiently integrated into mainstream recruiting infrastructure that a government compliance form became a familiar feature of the American job application experience.

Exactly how far that practice traveled beyond employers subject to the requirement remains difficult to quantify.

That uncertainty belongs in the story.

The box developed a life of its own

To the applicant, none of this regulatory history is visible.

The applicant sees:

Yes, I have a disability.

No, I do not have a disability.

I do not wish to answer.

That simplicity disguises the competing objectives underneath it.

Privacy.

Measurement.

Affirmative action.

Nondiscrimination.

Regulatory oversight.

Applicant trust.

Workforce representation.

And one profound problem:

The better the government becomes at measuring disability representation, the more disability information somebody has to provide.

The more aggressively the law protects applicants from disability inquiries, the more difficult that measurement can become.

In 2026, the Department of Labor chose a side of that conflict that represents a remarkable reversal.

The government is now dismantling the system it built

On August 21, 2026, the Department of Labor published a final rule substantially changing the regulations implementing Section 503.

The rule takes effect September 21.

Among the changes, DOL is eliminating the disability self identification requirement, the 7 percent utilization goal and related data collection and analysis requirements.

The government has announced that CC-305 will be discontinued.

Section 503 itself is not disappearing.

The prohibition against disability discrimination remains.

Applicable affirmative action obligations remain.

Reasonable accommodation obligations remain.

But a central piece of the measurement architecture built during the previous era is being removed.

And DOL's reasoning makes the story even more unusual.

DOL and EEOC do not merely disagree around the edges

The 2026 rule should not be described simply as regulators modernizing an old form.

DOL concluded that the employer initiated disability inquiry required by the Section 503 regulations could not be reconciled with the ADA's restrictions on disability related inquiries.

The Department reasoned that calling the process voluntary self identification did not change the fact that an employer had posed the question.

Even more significantly, DOL confronted prior EEOC guidance that had treated voluntary self identification differently in the affirmative action context.

DOL rejected that interpretation.

Explicitly.

That turns the history of the checkbox into something close to an institutional paradox.

One federal disability policy created a mechanism intended to make affirmative action measurable.

Another body of disability law restricted employers from asking applicants about disability.

For years, regulators operated a framework intended to accommodate both.

Now DOL says the reconciliation was wrong.

The question designed to help enforce disability opportunity is being removed partly because the government now concludes that requiring employers to ask it conflicts with disability protections.

Not everyone agrees that losing the box is a loss

It would be easy to flatten the dispute into a familiar story.

Disability advocates want measurement.

Government wants deregulation.

Reality is more complicated.

Commenters opposing the 2026 changes warned that removing self identification, utilization analysis and related requirements could weaken accountability, reduce visibility into disability employment outcomes and make it more difficult to identify barriers.

But the rulemaking record also includes criticism of the existing architecture from a disabled commenter who described the utilization system as a box checking exercise and questioned the reliability of the underlying data.

That criticism deserves attention.

A measurement system is useful only if the measurement is meaningful.

Self identification data can be affected by whether people understand the question, whether they identify with the term disability, whether their condition falls within the definition, whether they trust the employer and whether they believe disclosure is safe.

A numerical goal built on incomplete disclosure does not automatically reveal the true state of disability inclusion.

The old system therefore had weaknesses.

Removing it creates different ones.

What replaces it?

This might be the most consequential finding in the entire investigation.

The answer is not another federal disability representation metric.

DOL's final rule does not establish a replacement measurement mechanism for the architecture it is removing.

That matters because the original problem has not disappeared.

Employers still need to know whether their hiring systems provide equal opportunity.

Federal contractors still have obligations.

Disabled applicants still move through recruitment and selection processes.

But one of the government's principal mechanisms for quantifying disability representation is being retired without an equivalent successor.

The question from the 1970s therefore returns in a new form:

How do you measure whether disabled people are receiving equal employment opportunity if you do not ask who is disabled?

There may be ways to evaluate accessibility, accommodation processes, outreach, selection procedures and employment practices without maintaining the same demographic architecture.

But those measures answer different questions.

You can measure whether an application is accessible without knowing how many disabled people abandoned it.

You can test whether an assessment works with a screen reader without knowing whether blind applicants are advancing at the same rate as other applicants.

You can audit an accommodation process without knowing how many people decided not to request an accommodation.

Accessibility testing can reveal barriers.

It cannot automatically reveal population outcomes.

The government has chosen to remove one measurement system.

The underlying measurement problem remains.

And while that system is disappearing, hiring itself has changed.

The hiring process learned to measure far more than a checkbox ever could

Consider what can happen after someone submits a modern application.

Software can parse a resume.

A system can rank applicants.

A chatbot can ask screening questions.

An online assessment can measure responses.

A candidate can complete a recorded video interview.

Software can analyze or score aspects of that interaction.

An employer can use tests to evaluate cognitive, behavioral or job related characteristics.

None of those systems needs access to CC-305 to encounter something affected by disability.

That is where the investigation moves beyond the box.

The disability answer may be confidential.

The applicant is not invisible.

A system does not need to know the word disability

Suppose a hiring assessment measures speech.

An applicant stutters.

The system does not need a field reading disabled equals yes.

It encounters the applicant's speech directly.

Suppose a timed assessment rewards speed.

A disability affects how someone interacts with the interface.

The system does not need a diagnosis.

It sees the interaction.

Suppose an applicant uses assistive technology that does not work properly with an assessment.

No demographic disclosure is necessary.

The barrier has already occurred.

Suppose a screening question asks whether a cashier can stand continuously for several hours.

A wheelchair user says no.

If the system treats that answer as disqualifying even though the essential work could be performed while seated, disability has entered the selection process without anyone opening a confidential disability form.

This is the kind of scenario regulators have flagged as a risk under the ADA's employment testing rules.

The important distinction is between identifying disability and responding to a characteristic affected by disability.

A system can do the second without doing the first.

When the test measures the disability instead of the job

This problem is older than automated hiring.

The ADA already addresses employment tests and selection criteria that screen out people with disabilities.

If a test tends to screen out an individual because of disability, the employer may need to establish that the criterion is job related and consistent with business necessity.

Tests should measure the skill or aptitude they are supposed to measure rather than an unrelated sensory, manual or speaking impairment.

That principle becomes especially important when technology creates distance between the employer and the applicant.

A score can look objective.

A ranking can look precise.

A threshold can look neutral.

But precision does not establish validity.

If speech is being used as a proxy for problem solving, the employer should be able to explain why.

If speed is being used as a proxy for competence, the relationship should be defensible.

If eye movement is being interpreted as engagement, the employer should know how disability affects that inference.

If an assessment rejects someone who could perform the essential functions with an accommodation, automation has not made the decision more objective.

It has made the mistake faster.

Different disabilities create different failure modes

There is no single disabled applicant.

A blind applicant encounters one set of barriers.

A wheelchair user may encounter another.

A person with epilepsy may encounter another.

Someone who stutters may encounter another.

An autistic applicant may interact differently with a video or behavioral assessment.

A person with dyslexia, ADHD or another cognitive disability may encounter a different problem in a timed or text intensive evaluation.

A technology that works well for one disability category can still disadvantage another.

That makes disability particularly difficult to address through simplistic fairness testing.

An employer cannot meaningfully conclude that a hiring system is accessible merely because one disabled test group successfully used it.

The relevant question is what the system measures, how it measures it, and whether disability can alter the measurement in ways unrelated to job performance.

The accommodation problem begins before someone asks for one

Reasonable accommodation is supposed to provide qualified disabled applicants access to the hiring process.

But requesting an accommodation can itself require disclosure.

That creates another version of the original paradox.

An applicant may need to reveal disability in order to prevent an assessment from measuring the effects of disability.

Yet the applicant may fear revealing disability precisely because they are still competing for the job.

A well designed hiring system reduces that conflict.

Applicants should know what an assessment requires.

They should know how they will be evaluated.

They should know how to request an accommodation.

Alternative formats should exist where required.

And an accommodation request should not become an informal negative signal.

The worst design waits for the applicant to fail and only afterward discovers that the test was inaccessible.

The employer cannot outsource responsibility

Hiring technology creates another tempting defense:

The vendor made the decision.

Disability law does not provide such a simple escape.

Government guidance has warned employers that using another company's hiring technology does not eliminate the employer's responsibility to avoid disability discrimination.

That means accessibility becomes a procurement issue.

Before buying or deploying a hiring system, an employer should be able to ask:

What exactly does this system measure?

Which behaviors affect the score?

Why are those behaviors relevant to the job?

Can applicants use assistive technology?

How does someone request an accommodation?

Can the assessment be offered another way?

What happens when an accommodation changes the interaction being measured?

Has the system been evaluated across different disabilities?

Can an automated rejection be reviewed by a person?

What evidence demonstrates that the system measures job relevant ability rather than characteristics merely correlated with its training data or assessment design?

Those are not objections to technology.

They are questions about whether the technology works.

Can automated hiring help disabled applicants?

There is an important counterargument.

Technology can potentially reduce some forms of human subjectivity.

Structured assessments can make criteria more consistent.

Accessible remote interviewing can eliminate some physical barriers.

Software can help employers reach larger pools of candidates.

Assistive technologies themselves demonstrate that technology can expand access dramatically.

An automated system is not inherently discriminatory merely because it is automated.

But during this investigation, strong evidence demonstrating that automated hiring systems broadly improve employment outcomes for disabled applicants proved difficult to locate.

That absence should not be converted into evidence that the systems cause harm.

It means something narrower:

Claims that automation makes hiring fairer for disabled people deserve the same evidentiary scrutiny as claims that automation makes it worse.

Neither proposition should be accepted merely because it sounds plausible.

And the employment gap is still there

This debate is occurring against a persistent disparity.

Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 2025 show that people with disabilities remained substantially less likely to be employed than people without disabilities.

The unemployment rate among people with disabilities participating in the labor force was also roughly twice the rate among people without disabilities.

Those figures do not tell us why.

They cannot establish how much of the difference results from discrimination, health, transportation, education, occupational distribution, inaccessible technology, benefits policy, accommodation failures, hiring practices or other factors.

They certainly cannot prove that a disability checkbox or an algorithm caused the gap.

But they establish why the measurement question matters.

A society with a substantial disability employment disparity is now reconsidering one of the mechanisms it used to measure disability participation.

At the same time, the process determining who advances toward employment is becoming technologically more complex.

Those developments should be considered together.

Perhaps we have been staring at the wrong box

For years, disabled applicants have looked at the self identification question and wondered whether answering honestly could cost them an opportunity.

That fear deserves respect.

The legal history itself tells us why.

But the investigation points toward a more complicated conclusion.

The disability box was designed as a measurement instrument.

Its answer was supposed to be separated from the individual hiring decision.

That does not prove every employer always honored the separation. Regulatory design is not evidence of universal compliance.

But neither did this investigation uncover evidence supporting the sweeping claim that checking CC-305 routinely causes employers to reject disabled applicants.

We should not manufacture that conclusion.

The more consequential accessibility problems may occur somewhere else entirely.

A resume screen.

A chatbot.

An assessment.

A timed test.

An inaccessible interface.

A recorded interview.

A scoring model.

An accommodation process.

A hiring manager's assumptions.

A selection criterion that has always existed and nobody has reconsidered.

Disability can become relevant in every one of those places without the employer ever consulting the box.

What should replace checkbox thinking

If the old measurement architecture is disappearing, employers serious about disability inclusion need a more demanding definition of accessibility.

Do not ask only whether the application contains a disability disclosure form.

Ask whether disabled people can complete the application.

Do not ask only whether an assessment treats everyone identically.

Ask whether it measures the actual requirements of the job.

Do not ask only whether accommodation is technically available.

Ask whether applicants know how to obtain it without jeopardizing their candidacy.

Do not ask only whether a vendor claims its product is accessible.

Test it with disabled people.

Do not ask only whether an automated system contains disability as a variable.

Investigate whether other variables or measured behaviors can be affected by disability.

Do not ask only whether a company has an affirmative action policy.

Determine whether the employment system produces accessible opportunities.

And if an organization wants to measure disability representation after the federal architecture changes, it will have to confront the same problem policymakers have been wrestling with for decades:

How can we obtain enough information to detect exclusion without creating another mechanism people reasonably fear could be used to exclude them?

There is no checkbox capable of answering that.

The box that isn't supposed to matter

The disability question did not begin as a trap.

It began as an attempt to make a promise measurable.

In 1973, the federal government told covered contractors to take affirmative action to employ and advance people with disabilities.

Eventually regulators confronted the weakness of demanding progress without being able to measure representation.

They asked people to identify themselves.

They standardized the question.

They created a utilization goal.

Employers incorporated the requirement.

Software companies built it into recruiting systems.

Applicants encountered it again and again.

And a question designed to measure inclusion acquired another meaning in the minds of the people being asked:

Will telling you who I am change whether you want me?

The system tried to answer no.

The response would be confidential.

Hiring decision makers were not supposed to see it.

The information was for measurement, not selection.

Now, more than fifty years after Section 503 began, the federal government is dismantling much of that measurement architecture because the Department of Labor concludes that requiring the inquiry cannot be reconciled with the ADA's restrictions on disability questions.

There is no equivalent federal measurement mechanism waiting to replace it.

But the hiring process did not become simpler while the government was reconsidering the box.

It became capable of measuring far more.

Speech.

Speed.

Responses.

Resumes.

Assessments.

Interactions.

Patterns.

Scores.

Some of those measurements may make hiring better.

Some may create barriers.

Many require more scrutiny than they currently receive.

And none requires an applicant to answer yes to the question that started this investigation.

That may be the most important lesson hidden inside the disability checkbox.

For decades, we have debated whether employers should be allowed or required to ask who is disabled.

The next question is harder:

Can we tell whether a hiring system gives disabled people an equal opportunity even when the system never asks?

The box was never supposed to decide who gets the job.

What matters now is everything around it.

Analysis

> *The disability self identification form was built on a specific and fairly sophisticated premise: that disability could be made to matter to systemic measurement of equal opportunity without being allowed to matter to any individual hiring decision. That premise required a wall between the answer and the person doing the hiring, and the regulatory design of Form CC-305 attempted to build exactly that wall. Removing the form does not remove the underlying question the wall was built to protect. Whether disabled applicants receive equal opportunity in hiring is now harder to measure at the population level, at the same time that hiring itself increasingly runs through resume screening tools, assessments, and automated systems capable of*

> *encountering disability related characteristics through entirely different channels than a self identification checkbox ever could. The central finding of this investigation is not that the checkbox caused harm or that its removal will. It is that eliminating a flawed measurement system does not, by itself, answer the harder question it was built to help answer: whether the mechanisms that actually decide who gets hired measure job relevant ability rather than characteristics affected by disability.*

Industry Impact

Employers, especially federal contractors and any organization using major recruiting or human capital software, will need to adjust compliance workflows built around Form CC-305 and the 7 percent utilization goal as those requirements lapse, while recognizing that Section 503's underlying nondiscrimination and reasonable accommodation obligations continue unchanged. The more durable implication reaches beyond federal contracting: any organization deploying resume screening, online assessments, video interviewing, or other hiring technology should treat disability related disparate effects as a live compliance and design question under the ADA's existing job relatedness and business necessity standard, independent of whatever happens to Section 503's own reporting architecture.

Practical Takeaways

Do not assume a hiring assessment is fair simply because it does not ask about disability. Validate that it measures abilities genuinely required for the job, consistent with the ADA's job relatedness and business necessity standard for tests that screen out people with disabilities.

Test recruiting and assessment platforms with disabled users before and after deployment rather than relying only on a vendor's own accessibility claims.

Give applicants clear, upfront information about what a hiring technology measures and how, so they can make an informed decision about whether to request an accommodation.

Scrutinize seemingly neutral screening factors, such as employment gaps or speed based scoring, for proxy effects that could disadvantage disabled applicants without ever referencing disability directly.

Preserve meaningful human review of automated screening outcomes rather than treating an algorithmic score or rejection as final.

Recognize that a vendor's use of your hiring technology does not transfer away your own responsibility to avoid disability discrimination.

Understand that removing a disability related question from an application does not, by itself, establish that disabled applicants have equal access. Identical treatment and equal access are not automatically the same thing.

Recommended Actions

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Federal contractors should confirm which Section 503 obligations continue after September 21, 2026, including nondiscrimination, reasonable accommodation, and affirmative action plan requirements, separately from the self identification and utilization goal requirements being eliminated.

Employers using third party recruiting or assessment platforms should ask vendors directly what each tool measures, whether it has been evaluated for disability related disparate effects, and how an accommodation can be provided without penalizing the candidate.

Organizations that want to continue tracking disability representation voluntarily should design any replacement measurement approach around the same confidentiality and separation from selection decisions that governed Form CC-305, since the ADA's restrictions on disability inquiries do not depend on the loss of the Section 503 mandate.

Hiring teams should establish a documented process for human review of automated rejections, particularly where an assessment, ranking system, or screening tool played a role in the outcome.

Legal, HR, and procurement teams should coordinate before adopting new hiring technology, treating accessibility and disparate impact testing as a procurement requirement rather than a post deployment concern.

Key Findings

13 findings

Evidence

21 records

Source Appendix

17 sources

UPDATE HISTORY

Published September 4, 2026

HOW THIS ARTICLE WAS BUILT

17 sources reviewed.

4 source categories represented (Advocacy, Government, Research, Technology).

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