

cial estoppel issue has arisen, for example, where courts have found that statements made on applications for social security benefits to the effect that the plaintiff is unable to work create a presumption that the plaintiff must rebut in order to show that he or she is qualified to work.⁴²⁸

EEOC, however, disagrees with this interpretation of the law. EEOC states that its position is that representations made in connection with an application for disability benefits should not be an automatic bar to an ADA claim.⁴²⁹ A majority of courts agree with EEOC's interpretation.⁴³⁰ For instance, in *Griffith v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, the Sixth Circuit found that statements made in an application for social security disability benefits, while relevant, do not require application of judicial estoppel, in part because such applications give no consideration to an individual's ability to work with reasonable accommodation, which is required under the ADA.⁴³¹ In *Talavera v. School Board of Palm Beach County*, the Eleventh Circuit reversed a district court's finding

⁴²⁸ See, e.g., *McConathy v. Dr. Pepper/Seven Up Corp.*, 131 F.3d 558, 562-563, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 1058, *10 (5th Cir., 1998) (holding that statements on a social security benefits application created a presumption that plaintiff was not a qualified person with a disability and that plaintiff provided no evidence to rebut this presumption); see also *Shaheen v. Amsted Industries, Inc.*, 1997 U.S. App. LEXIS 35312, *3 (6th Cir. 1997) (finding that judicial estoppel was the appropriate analysis to employ where claimant continued to receive disability benefits while seeking reinstatement under ADA).

⁴²⁹ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. i.

⁴³⁰ See, e.g., *McCreary v. Libbey-Owens-Ford Co.*, 132 F.3d 1159, 7 1164 (7th Cir. 1997) (finding that statements certified to the Social Security Administration claiming inability to work do not bar ADA claims because Social Security Administration definition of disability differs from that of the ADA, making disability benefits application statements inconclusive in an ADA case); *Blanton v. Inco Alloys Int'l*, 123 F.3d 916, 917 (6th Cir. 1997) (finding that receipt of social security benefits does not automatically estop an ADA plaintiff from claiming he could perform his job, although it is a factor to consider); *Weigel v. Target Stores*, 122 F.3d 461, 466-67 (7th Cir. 1997) (holding that because the Social Security Administration's definition of disability, as well as those of most disability insurance plans, differs materially from the ADA's definition of a "qualified individual with a disability," these representations are not conclusive as to the ADA). *Overton v. Reilly*, 977 F.2d 1190, 1196 (7th Cir. 1992) (a determination of disability for Social Security Act purposes cannot be construed as a judgment that an individual cannot do a particular job).

⁴³¹ *Griffith v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 135 F.3d 376 (6th Cir. 1998).

that an ADA plaintiff who has claimed total disability on a benefits application is *per se* estopped from claiming she could work with reasonable accommodation, because the Social Security Administration, in determining "disability," does not take into account the potential effect of reasonable accommodation on the claimant's ability to work.⁴³² In another case, *Smith v. Dovenmuehle Mortgage Inc.*, a district court held that the plaintiff was not judicially estopped from arguing that he was qualified under the ADA based on the reasoning that to hold otherwise would put the plaintiff "in the untenable position" of having to choose between his right to seek disability benefits and his right to seek redress for a possible violation of the ADA and that judicial estoppel would frustrate the ADA's purpose of combating discrimination against people with disabilities.⁴³³

Other courts, however, are interpreting the law based on a judicial estoppel analysis.⁴³⁴ For instance, the Sixth Circuit, in *Shaheen v. Amsted Industries, Inc.*, found judicial estoppel the appropriate analysis to employ where claimant continues to receive disability benefits and seeks reinstatement under ADA.⁴³⁵ In *McNemar v. Disney Store*, the Third Circuit held that an HIV-positive store manager who had stated on applications for disability benefits that he was totally and permanently disabled and unable to work was judicially estopped from claiming he was a qualified individual under the ADA.⁴³⁶

EEOC states that it has five purposes with this guidance. The first is to analyze the differ-

⁴³² *Talavera v. School Bd. of Palm Beach County*, 129 F.3d 1214, 1220 (11th Cir. 1997).

⁴³³ *Smith v. Dovenmuehle Mortgage, Inc.*, 859 F. Supp. 1138, 1141-43 (N.D. Ill. 1994).

⁴³⁴ See, e.g., *McConathy v. Dr. Pepper/Seven Up Corp.*, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 1058, *10 (5th Cir., 1998) (holding that statements on a Social Security benefits application created a presumption that plaintiff was not a qualified person with a disability and she provided no evidence to rebut this presumption); *August v. Offices Unlimited, Inc.*, 981 F.2d 576, 583-84 (1st Cir. 1992) (treating the plaintiff's statements regarding disability to insurance carriers as binding admissions).

⁴³⁵ 1997 U.S. App. LEXIS 35312, *3 (6th Cir. 1997).

⁴³⁶ *McNemar v. Disney Store*, 91 F.3d 610, 619-21 (3rd Cir. 1996), cert. denied, 117 S. Ct. 958 (1997). However, according to a Senior EEOC Attorney, after EEOC issued its policy guidance on the issue, the Third Circuit has called into question the *McNemar* decision. See NIDRR ADA Technical Assistance Program Project Directors' Meeting, Feb. 24-25, 1998, summary (OCRE files), statement of Sharon Rennert, p. 4.

ences between ADA's purposes and standards and those of other disability benefit programs.⁴³⁷ The second is to discuss and analyze recent and significant court decisions that have addressed the judicial estoppel issue.⁴³⁸ The third is to explain why judicial estoppel should not be used to bar ADA claims of individuals who also have applied for disability benefits.⁴³⁹ The fourth purpose is to explain why EEOC's position on this issue is supported by public policy.⁴⁴⁰ Finally, EEOC seeks to provide guidance to investigative staff in assessing what weight, if any, to give to representations made in applications for disability benefits in determining if an ADA claimant is a "qualified individual with a disability" for purposes of the ADA.

EEOC's Analysis ***Fundamentally Different Purposes and Standards in ADA***

The guidance opens its argument by stating that the ADA's definitions of the terms "disability" and "qualified individual with a disability" are "tailored to the broad remedial" purposes of the statute," including the elimination of barriers preventing individuals with disabilities from gaining access to the mainstream of American life, equal employment, and other opportunities.⁴⁴¹ As a result, the definitions of "disability" and "qualified individual with a disability" under the ADA differ from the definitions of the same or similar terms in the Social Security Act, State workers' compensation laws, disability insurance plans, and other disability benefits programs. Terms in these laws are tailored to their specific purposes just as terms in the ADA are tailored to its purposes.

The fundamentally different purposes of these laws are a key element of the guidance's argument that representations made by an individual in applying for disability benefits should not bar him or her from bringing an ADA claim. In advancing this argument, the guidance relies on several specific ways in which the ADA's requirement of a "qualified individual with a dis-

ability" differs from requirements of disability benefit schemes. First, the guidance notes, the ADA is based on the fundamental principle "that individuals who want to work and are qualified to work must have an equal opportunity to work," and the requirement for a "qualified individual with a disability" reflects this principle.⁴⁴² Second, the "qualified individual with a disability" requirement focuses on what an individual can do, as opposed to what he or she cannot do, which is the focus of the disability benefit schemes.⁴⁴³ Third, a determination of whether an individual is a "qualified individual with a disability" requires an individualized assessment of a person's abilities, as opposed to an evaluation of general or group characteristics.⁴⁴⁴ Finally, the "qualified individual with a disability" requirement "looks at whether an individual with a disability is qualified for the specific position at issue, not at whether s/he is qualified for work in general."⁴⁴⁵

Determining if an individual is a "qualified individual with a disability" under the ADA must be made in keeping with these principles. This determination requires two steps: the first is to determine if the individual has the "education, training, skills, experience, and other job-related credentials for the position";⁴⁴⁶ the second step is to determine if the individual can perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodation. The guidance reiterates the principles on which this determination must be based, e.g., an individualized, case-by-case assessment of the specific abilities of the person and a focus on "whether a

⁴³⁷ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 2.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5 (citing 42 U.S.C. § 12101(a) (9) (1994) (noting that discrimination "denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis and to pursue those opportunities for which our free society is justifiably famous.")).

⁴⁴³ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 5 (citing 135 CONG. REC. S10,711 (daily ed. Sept. 7, 1989) (statement of Sen. Harkin)).

⁴⁴⁴ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 5 (citing 42 U.S.C. § 12101(a) (7) (1994) (denouncing "stereotypic assumptions not truly indicative of the *individual ability* of [people with disabilities] to participate in, and contribute to, society") (emphasis added)).

⁴⁴⁵ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 5

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

particular individual with a disability is qualified for a particular position, not whether the individual or a group of individuals with a disability is qualified for a class of positions."⁴⁴⁷

The guidance contrasts the purposes and standards of the ADA with those of social security, workers' compensation, and disability insurance.⁴⁴⁸ Each discussion shows clear contrasts between the purposes and standards of the various disability benefits plans and those of the ADA. For example, the guidance contrasts the ADA with the Social Security Act (SSA)⁴⁴⁹ by noting that the latter "establishes a social insurance program designed to provide guaranteed income to individuals with disabilities when they are found to be generally incapable of gainful employment."⁴⁵⁰ The guidance further notes that, in contrast to the ADA's definitions of "disability" and "qualified individual with a disability":

The SSA definition of the term "disability," . . . reflects the obligation to provide benefits to people who generally are unable to work. As a result, the definition focuses on what a person cannot do and on whether s/he cannot find work in the national economy in general.⁴⁵¹

Workers' compensation laws also differ significantly from the ADA—for example, they are based on general classifications of disability and ability to work.⁴⁵² Disability insurance, the guidance observes, is meant to provide partial wage replacement to employees whose health conditions prevent them from working.⁴⁵³ As a result, just as with SSA and workers' compensation

laws, disability insurance plans focus on what a person with a disability cannot do rather than on what he or she can do.⁴⁵⁴

In determining eligibility for benefits, the guidance explains, an essential requirement under the SSA is that the claimant must be unable to engage in "any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months."⁴⁵⁵ This standard is substantially different from that of the ADA in the way it describes work and the way it describes disability.

The next important difference is that the ADA focuses on an individualized assessment of a person's ability to work, while the SSA relies on a general profile.⁴⁵⁶ The guidance further notes that the ADA distinguishes between essential and nonessential functions in determining whether an individual with a disability is qualified to work.⁴⁵⁷ The SSA does not make this distinction, so someone who can perform essential but not all job functions may be disabled under SSA while the same individual would be a qualified individual with a disability under the ADA.⁴⁵⁸ Finally, the guidance notes that the ADA determination is based on a consideration of whether an individual can perform essential job functions if provided with reasonable accommodation.⁴⁵⁹ The SSA system does not consider reasonable accommodation in making its determination as to ability to work.⁴⁶⁰

The SSA regulations explicitly recognize that its determinations are based on social security

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (citing 29 C.F.R. pt. 1630 app. (noting in "Background" section that "the determination of whether an individual is qualified for a particular position must necessarily be made on a case-by-case basis" and that a "case-by-case approach is essential if qualified individuals of varying abilities are to receive equal opportunities to compete for an infinitely diverse range of jobs.")).

⁴⁴⁸ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 7.

⁴⁴⁹ *See generally*, 42 U.S.C. §§ 301-1397f (1994).

⁴⁵⁰ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 8.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² Workers' compensation laws typically provide the following four classifications of disability: temporary partial, temporary total, permanent partial, and permanent total. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8 (citing 42 U.S.C. § 423(d) (1) (A) (1994); 20 C.F.R. § 404.1505 (1997)).

⁴⁵⁶ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 11 (stating "whereas the ADA always requires an individualized inquiry into the ability of a particular person to meet the requirements of a particular position, the SSA permits general presumptions about an individual's ability to work.").

⁴⁵⁷ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," pp. 11-12.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.* (stating: "the definition of the term 'qualified individual with a disability' expressly requires consideration of whether the individual can perform essential functions with reasonable accommodation.") *See* 42 U.S.C. §§ 12111(8) (1994) (citation added).

⁴⁶⁰ *See generally* 42 U.S.C. §§ 423(d), 1381-1383 (1994).

law and that, as the guidance notes, "a decision by any other entity about whether an individual is disabled is based on the entity's rules and may not be the same as the SSA's determination."⁴⁶¹

In the section of the guidance discussing the SSA program, EEOC also argues that courts are wrongly applying the judicial estoppel analysis by explaining that although the SSA program is based on serving people with disabilities who are deemed unable to work, even the SSA recognizes that an individual may be found unable to work under its definition but still be capable of working in a particular position. The guidance explains that although the SSA program is designed to provide a guaranteed income to people who meet its eligibility requirements, it has work incentives built into it. For example, the SSA has a trial work period that allows beneficiaries to work for 9 months while still receiving benefits.⁴⁶²

EEOC provides hypothetical examples in illustration and cites caselaw to support its position. The first example involves an individual whose disability is the loss of both hands and feet. The listed impairments in SSA's regulations include the loss of both hands and feet in its musculoskeletal category of impairment. Because this is a listed impairment, an individual who has lost both hands and feet may be presumed unable to work for purposes of SSA's disability benefits determination. However, under the ADA, the same individual can be a "qualified individual with a disability" who is capable of working and performing the essential functions of a job with or without reasonable accommodation.⁴⁶³

The second hypothetical example involves an individual who is blind. Under the SSA, any claimant over 55 with a visual impairment that meets the statutory definition of blindness is presumed to be incapable of "substantial gainful activity" and deemed eligible of SSA disability benefits. There are a number of reasons why this individual might be considered qualified to work under the ADA. First, the SSA, unlike the ADA, does not consider whether there is a reasonable

accommodation that might allow this individual to perform the essential functions of a particular job. Second, there are no statutory definitions of disabilities under the ADA that presume an individual incapable of working.⁴⁶⁴

The guidance notes several cases that support EEOC's position. For instance, in *Overton v. Reilly*,⁴⁶⁵ the Seventh Circuit held that a determination of disability for purposes of SSA cannot be construed to mean that an individual cannot do a particular job. Another case the guidance cites is *Eback v. Chater*,⁴⁶⁶ in which the Eighth Circuit stated that SSA's determination as to whether an individual can engage in "substantial gainful activity" is a generalized one and not based on an individualized assessment of the requirements or accommodations of a particular job.⁴⁶⁷

The guidance's discussion of workers' compensation and disability insurance plans points out the differences from the ADA. For example, workers' compensation laws focus on lost earning capacity, and on what the worker "can no longer do rather than on what s/he still is capable of doing with or without reasonable accommodation."⁴⁶⁸ Also, in determining disability, workers' compensation laws do not distinguish between essential and nonessential job duties; nor do they consider reasonable accommodation. As a result, "a person may be 'totally disabled' for workers' compensation purposes and yet still be able to perform a position's essential functions with or without reasonable accommodation."⁴⁶⁹ Like the other disability benefits plans, disability insurance plans often do not distinguish between essential and nonessential job functions;⁴⁷⁰ and they "frequently do not make allowance for an individual's ability to work with reasonable accommodation."⁴⁷¹

EEOC's subsequent legal analysis has two parts. The first is a section on how the ADA definition of "qualified individual with a disabil-

⁴⁶¹ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 11 (citing 20 C.F.R. § 404.1504 (1997)).

⁴⁶² EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 9 (citing 20 C.F.R. § 404.1592(a) (1997)).

⁴⁶³ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 11, n. 41.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12, n. 41.

⁴⁶⁵ 977 F.2d 1190, 1196 (7th Cir. 1992).

⁴⁶⁶ 94 F.3d 410 (8th Cir. 1996).

⁴⁶⁷ *Id.* at 412.

⁴⁶⁸ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," pp. 13-16.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

ity" always requires an individualized assessment under the ADA, whereas the three other schemes, SSA, workers' compensation, and disability insurance plans, permit generalized inquires and presumptions.⁴⁷² The second part of the analysis discusses how the ADA definition of "qualified individual with a disability" requires consideration of reasonable accommodation whereas in the other schemes, the equivalent definition of disability does not.⁴⁷³

The analysis opens by stating the proposition developed in the earlier sections, namely, that "an individual may be 'unable to work' for purposes of a disability benefits program and yet still be able to perform the essential functions of a particular position with or without reasonable accommodation."⁴⁷⁴ The guidance supports this statement with precedent in the caselaw.⁴⁷⁵ For example, the guidance notes a case, *Robinson v. Neodata Services, Inc.*,⁴⁷⁶ in which the Eighth Circuit found that SSA determinations of disability "are not synonymous with a determination of whether a plaintiff is a 'qualified' person for purposes of the ADA." In another case cited in the guidance, a court found that a finding by a State workers' compensation commission or the SSA does not automatically foreclose an ADA claim.⁴⁷⁷

In the analysis of the ADA's requirement of an individualized assessment in determining whether someone is a "qualified individual with a disability," the guidance states that unlike the various disability benefit schemes, the ADA never presumes that some impairments are so severe as to prevent an individual from working. In fact, the ADA presumes the opposite, that

individuals with disabilities can work.⁴⁷⁸ The guidance cites numerous cases in which courts have agreed that the ADA's requirement of an individualized assessment in determining disability and ability to work is a fundamental difference between the ADA and the various disability benefits programs, which rely on generalized classifications.⁴⁷⁹

This part of the analysis also addresses *McNemar v. The Disney Store, Inc.*,⁴⁸⁰ a case that disagrees with EEOC on the judicial estoppel issue. The *McNemar* court rejected the argument that because ADA's purposes and standards are fundamentally different from those of the SSA's, their conclusions as to qualifications and ability to work may differ significantly. The guidance states that the *McNemar* court wrongly decided the case because it had "overlooked the fact that 'unable to work' for SSA purposes does not mean unable to perform the essential functions of a particular position with or without reasonable accommodation."⁴⁸¹

In the second part of its analysis, the guidance emphasizes that the ADA, unlike the various disability benefits plans, requires an assessment as to whether an individual can work with a reasonable accommodation. In this discussion, the guidance further develops its argument with case precedent. For example, the guidance cites the case of *D'Aprile v. Fleet Services Corporation*,⁴⁸² in which the court found that an application for disability benefits "sheds no light" on how the plaintiff would have fared had the reasonable accommodation she had requested been made.⁴⁸³ Like *D'Aprile*, the cases discussed in this part of the analysis stand for the proposition that receipt of disability benefits does not show that an individual is totally un-

⁴⁷² See *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁷³ See *ibid.*, pp. 19-23.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (citing *Robinson v. Neodata Services, Inc.*, 94 F.3d 499, 502 n.2 (8th Cir. 1996); *Overton v. Reilly*, 977 F.2d 1190, 1196 (7th Cir. 1992); *Pegues v. Emerson Electric Co.*, 913 F. Supp. 976, 980 (N.D. Miss. 1996); *Palmer v. Circuit Court of Cook County*, 905 F. Supp. 499, 508 n.10 (N.D. Ill. 1995), *cert. denied*, 118 S. Ct. 893 (1998); *Smith v. Dovenmuehle Mortgage, Inc.*, 859 F. Supp. 1138, 1141-43 (N.D. Ill. 1994)).

⁴⁷⁶ 94 F.3d at 502 n.2.

⁴⁷⁷ *Pegues*, 913 F. Supp. at 980. The court in *Pegues* noted, however, that the substance of plaintiff's testimony and representations made in the workers' compensation and social security administration proceedings and their subsequent findings "trouble this court and pose the greatest hurdle for [plaintiff]." The court found against the plaintiff.

⁴⁷⁸ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 19.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22 (citing *Overton v. Reilly*, 977 F.2d 1190, 1196 (7th Cir. 1992); *Smith v. Dovenmuehle Mortgage, Inc.*, 859 F. Supp. 1138, 1141 (N.D. Ill. 1994); *Daffron v. McDonnell Douglas Corp.*, 874 S.W. 2d 482, 486 (Mo. Ct. App. 1994)).

⁴⁸⁰ 91 F.3d 610 (3rd Cir. 1996) *cert. denied*, 117 S. Ct. 958 (1997).

⁴⁸¹ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," pp. 21-22.

⁴⁸² 92 F.3d 1 (1st Cir. 1996).

⁴⁸³ EEOC, "Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits," p. 24 (citing 92 F.3d 1, 5 (1st Cir. 1996)).

able to work, because disability benefit plan applications do not consider whether the person could work with a reasonable accommodation.⁴⁸⁴ In concluding this analysis, the guidance states that the cases discussed demonstrate that “an individual can meet the eligibility requirements for disability benefits and still be able to perform the essential functions of particular positions with reasonable accommodation.”⁴⁸⁵

Role of Representations Made in Applications for Disability Benefits

The second section of the guidance sets forth EEOC's position that judicial estoppel should not be used as a bar to an ADA claim where the claimant has made previous representations on applications for disability benefits.⁴⁸⁶ The guidance addresses the doctrine of judicial estoppel and the role of summary judgment in cases involving ADA claimants who previously have applied for disability benefits.⁴⁸⁷ EEOC sets out several reasons why courts should not invoke judicial estoppel to bar ADA claims. First, an individual who claims that he or she is both “totally disabled” and a “qualified individual with a disability” has not necessarily made inconsistent statements.⁴⁸⁸ Second, the guidance notes that the doctrine of judicial estoppel generally has applied only when an individual made his or her earlier inconsistent statement in a prior *judicial proceeding*. However, applications for disability benefits are made as part of an administrative determination, a wholly different process. The guidance observes “[a]ccordingly, courts that have recognized the significant differences in judicial proceedings and administrative determinations have declined to apply judicial estoppel to bar claims of disability discrimi-

nation.”⁴⁸⁹ A third argument is that several circuits have refused to recognize the doctrine of judicial estoppel, so it has not been universally accepted as a legitimate legal theory.⁴⁹⁰

The guidance argues that summary judgment, a judicial determination of whether a trial is necessary, should not be granted to ADA defendants on the basis that the claimant previously has filed an application for disability benefits. In this discussion, the guidance notes that a court only will grant summary judgment where it determines that there is no genuine issue of material fact.⁴⁹¹ The guidance argues that because an individual's representations on an application for disability benefits do not mean that he or she is incapable of performing essential functions of a job with reasonable accommodation, the application for disability benefits does not mean that there is no question as to whether the individual is a “qualified individual with a disability.”⁴⁹²

The guidance notes that some weight may be given to representations made on disability benefits applications in determining whether an individual is a “qualified individual with a disability.” Context and timing are the criteria for deciding how much weight is allowed. For context, the guidance states that representations made on disability benefits applications should not be viewed in a vacuum, but rather in the context of all other relevant documents and the conditions under which the individual applied for the benefits.⁴⁹³ For example, the guidance cites cases where individuals who applied for disability had done so only after their employers had refused to provide reasonable accommoda-

⁴⁸⁴ EEOC, “Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits,” pp. 23–26 (citing *Eback v. Chater*, 94 F.3d 410, 412 (8th Cir. 1996); *D'Aprile v. Fleet Services Corp.*, 92 F.3d 1 (1st Cir. 1996); *Kennedy v. Applause*, 90 F.3d 1477 (9th Cir. 1996); *Ward v. Westvaco Corp.*, 859 F. Supp. 608, 615 (D.Mass. 1994)).

⁴⁸⁵ EEOC, “Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits,” p. 26.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.* (citing *Smith v. Dovenmuehle Mortgage Co.*, 859 F. Supp. 1138 (N.D. Ill. 1994)).

⁴⁸⁹ EEOC, “Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits,” p. 28 (citing *Mohamed v. Marriott*, 944 F.Supp. 277, 283–84 (S.D.N.Y., 1996)).

⁴⁹⁰ EEOC, “Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits,” p. 27 citing *United Mine Workers of America 1974 Pension v. Pittston Co.*, 984 F.2d 469, 477 (D.C. Cir.), *cert. denied*, 509 U.S. 924 (1993); *Chrysler Credit Corp. v. County Chrysler Inc.*, 928 F.2d 1509, 1520 n.10 (10th Cir. 1991)).

⁴⁹¹ EEOC, “Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits,” p. 29 (citing *Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c)*).

⁴⁹² EEOC, “Enforcement Guidance on the Effect of Representations Made in Applications for Benefits,” p. 30.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.