

APPEAL TO STATE COMMISSIONER

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Administrative Reforms

1. Need of Assistant Director for placement and Assistant Director for welfare of Differently Abled

There is an immediate need to fill up the vacancy of AD Placement for the Differently abled. This post has been remaining vacant for the past 3 years. Many differently abled persons from our State had to approach the Courts of Law for readdressing their grievances which could otherwise have been amicably solved easily by the AD Placement. Moreover employment rights for the differently abled could not be fully availed and the bottlenecks in this regard could not be removed in the absence of an officer exclusively for the placement purpose.

2. Need of Assistant Director for welfare of Differently Abled

The post of the Assistant Director, Welfare of Differently Abled, has been vacant for the past one year. As a result the progress in implementing the 65 schemes for the welfare of Differently abled persons in Tamilnadu has been far below the expectation. There is an urgent need to fill up the vacancy of this post as the above officer is responsible for ensuring the disability rights with regard to PWD Act.

3. Appointing differently abled as vocational Guidance Officers in all districts.

The Government of Tamilnadu has appointed differently abled persons as Vocational Guidance officer exclusively for differently abled persons in 4 districts of Tamilnadu which are Madurai, Thirunelveli, Chennai and Nagapattinam, to give guidance and counseling to the differently abled job aspirants in selecting career and job opportunities that are available to them. Though it was indicated by the Government that VGOs will be appointed in all the other Districts subsequently, so far the Government has not appointed VGOs for the remaining districts. The Government is requested to appoint these VGOs in all Districts which will facilitate better availment of employment for the differently abled candidates.

4. Appointment of Extension officers at Block level for Differently Abled

At present, District Differently Abled Rehabilitation officers have been posted only at district levels to do the extension work to motivate the differently abled persons to avail the various Government Welfare schemes and Disability Rights. According to the census report 2012, more than 6 lakh disabled persons live in rural areas. Due to poverty, and long distances many of them are not able to approach the DDROs at district level. Due to these circumstances there is need to appoint Extension Officers at every block level [385 blocks] so that all eligible differently abled persons can benefit from the welfare schemes of the Government and improve their basic standard of life.

Justification of an EO

After the creation of a separate Department for Welfare for the Differently Abled from the parent Social Welfare Department, the services of the block level extension officers of the Social Welfare Department towards the differently abled have abruptly stopped. As on date there are no extension officers for the Department of Welfare of the differently abled at the block level. There is an urgent need to appoint block level extension officers in all the 385 blocks to expedite implementation of various welfare schemes at the grass root level. The Vazhi Kattum Thittam introduced by Government of Tamilnadu for the welfare of the differently abled with a budget allocation of Rs 18 Crores could not be implemented due to various reasons and finally was withdrawn by the Government of Tamilnadu. In this regard we suggest that the amount allocated under the Vazhi Kattum Thittam can be purposefully utilized to create 385 extension rehabilitation officers for the differently abled at all the 385 blocks. The approximate annual expenditure for the purpose will be Rs 9.24 Crores by way of salaries for 385 officers at Rs 20,000 per month and Rs 38.50 lakhs for office maintenance at the rate of Rs 10,000 per year. The total expenditure will be Rs 9.74 Crores per year. With this budget there should not be any financial burden or difficulty for the Government to appoint block level Extension Officers.

5. Constitution of the Welfare Board for the differently abled

The Welfare Board for the differently abled which was constituted by Government of Tamilnadu is defunct. The Board may be constituted by appointing professionals who are working for the differently abled. It has to be ensured that the Board conducts periodic meetings and follow up action is taken on the decisions made by the Board.

6. Guidelines for implementation of welfare schemes for the visually impaired

Government of Tamilnadu is implementing 65 welfare schemes for the differently abled persons. In this connection it is observed that there are no guidelines framed for its implementation and there is no given time frame for disbursing the financial assistance under these schemes. It is therefore suggested that Government Issue clear guidelines and a time frame for implementing these schemes. Many DDROs in the district levels have expressed their difficulty in implementing Welfare measures due to lack of clear and precise guidelines.

Educational Facilities and Training Programmes.

1. The Diploma of Secondary Grade teacher training program for the visually impaired was originally initiated by Government of Tamilnadu to be provided in the Government Blind school, Poonamalle campus. Later orthopedically challenged were also admitted for the course. However, the above course was subsequently denied to the visually impaired. At present the course is being provided only to orthopedically challenge in the Poonamalle Blind school campus. This School was especially dedicated to the service of the visually impaired and not meant for orthopedically challenged. Denial of this opportunity to the visually impaired in an Institution that is meant for them is a violation of their rights. We appeal to the Government to reintroduce the secondary grade teacher training program for the visually impaired as low vision candidates can perform exceedingly well. If this program is revived these teachers can also get employed in special elementary schools. It may be mentioned here that this practice of appointing visually impaired teachers in secondary grade and elementary grade schools is in practice In Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and other States.
2. The Tamilnadu Textbook Corporation should produce and distribute Braille text books, eBooks to all visually impaired school students studying in various schools sponsored under State and Central government schemes such as, RMSA ,SSA and State Run special schools. At present the Welfare of the Differently Abled Department is supplying free Braille books only to students of Government Special Schools. The authority to publish all school text books rest with the Tamilnadu Text book Corporation and the official soft copies are with them. As the Department of Welfare of Differently Abled does not have the official soft copies of the text books, it outsources the printing of Braille Text Books to private agencies and the authenticity and quality of the content is not assured. The Government Braille Press is also defunct for many years. In view of the above reasons, it is suggested that the Tamilnadu Text Book Corporation is requested to take up the work of preparation of Braille text books and distribute them to the visually impaired students of special schools and schools under RMSA and SSA.

It is also suggested that the e-textbooks in text format be posted on the website of the Textbook Corporation for reading along with the screen reader. The Tamil medium text books in PDF format which are posted in the website at present are not readable. The government websites are also not disable- friendly or easily accessible and this is against the Government of India's Guidelines.

3. Special schools for the differently abled students were originally under the supervision and control of the Department of School Education. The Department of School Education has subsequently transferred the supervision of these special schools to the department of Welfare of the differently abled on the grounds that Department of Welfare of Differently Abled will be in a better position to guide them for effective functioning based on their special needs. SSA and RMSA, are however being handled by the Department of School Education. The District level Executive officers of the Department of School Education such as CEOs, DEOs and

AEOs are not qualified in special education. The Department of School Education is not a competent authority in respect to both these schemes as they do not have professional qualification and expertise as stipulated by Rehabilitation Council of India. As a result the special children's educational standards of these integrated schools suffer. RCI has regulated norms and standardized special education which includes guidelines for school, student teacher ratio, special teacher professional qualifications and appointment of Special Education teachers. It is therefore suggested that SSA and RMSA schemes be handed over to the Department of Welfare of Differently Abled.

4. Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Tamilnadu is bearing the entire educational expenses incurred by ST and SC students to pursue college education in private colleges. As the differently abled are also underprivileged and disadvantaged like SC/ST students, the Department of Welfare of Differently Abled is requested to bear the complete educational expenses incurred by the differently abled who pursue college education in private colleges. All visually impaired students irrespective of their community categories (SC/ST/OBC) must be provided complete financial assistance to pursue their studies in private colleges.
5. Government of India has already issued detailed guidelines for appointment of scribes and has requested all State Governments to issue Government Orders incorporating the above guidelines. We request the State Government to issue orders incorporating the GO guidelines at the earliest.

Barrier Free Environment

1. The official website of Social Welfare and Nutritious meal program Department does not have a provision to apply online for assistance to the various welfare schemes as well as to track the status of these applications. We request that the website of the Department of welfare of Differently Abled also be suitably modified to include the facility for online applications by the eligible candidates for assistance under various welfare schemes as well as tracking of the current status of these applications.
2. Government of Tamilnadu has been providing assistance to low vision visually impaired persons by providing aids and appliances for low vision. In many cases many visually impaired persons with low vision obtained ID cards meant for 100 percent vision loss as there was no system of issuing ID cards for persons with low vision. We request the Government to arrange for issuing fresh ID cards for persons with low vision. Government may permit those existing ID card holders who have low vision to surrender their cards and get low vision ID cards to enable them to avail the facilities provided by the State Government for persons with low vision.

Employment Opportunities

Even though Government of Tamilnadu has issued instructions to Government aided Institutions to reserve 2% of teaching posts to visually impaired, there is no system of monitoring the compliance of these instructions. We request The Department of Welfare of Differently abled to monitor implementing the 2 % reservations in these Government aided institutions and also conduct inspections of these institutions.

Aids and Appliances

1. Though the estimated visually impaired population of Tamilnadu is a laky and above only 80000 ID cards have been issued till date. The Government thus far has been providing only 5000 mobility sticks every year. Therefore it is imperative for the Government of Tamilnadu to provide mobility sticks to all the visually impaired persons who have Disability ID cards.
2. State government is providing free Braille watches to only a few visually impaired beneficiaries. Due to certain reasons visually impaired women are not reaping the benefits of availing free Braille Ladies Watches. Visually impaired women must be provided with Braille Watches made exclusively women. We request that Braille Watches be provided to all visually impaired persons without any gender bias.
3. Government of Tamilnadu is providing free tailoring machines to physically challenged persons and Speech and Hearing impaired but do not provide these free tailoring machines to visually impaired persons. However visually impaired are being provided training in tailoring under Central and State Government Training Programmes. We request that free tailoring machines be provided to those visually impaired persons who have been trained in tailoring.

Modality of financing under Scholarships

At present DDRO is disbursing the amount of scholarships to the eligible candidates by crediting the amounts to the bank accounts of differently abled beneficiaries and submitting the utilization certificates to the State Commissioners Office of the Differently Abled. In order to ensure transparency of these transactions, it is suggested that the DDRO give the list of names of the scholarship beneficiaries along with their bank account details to the District Treasury office with instructions to transfer the scholarship amount to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries through ECS . Till such time, the DDROs are requested to submit the utilization certificates along with the bank statement of DDRO bank account which must contain proof of the disbursements and the balance remaining in the account after the disbursements.