

Issue: Qualification – Performance (interim evaluation); Ruling Date: July 5, 2017;
Ruling No. 2017-4578; Agency: Virginia Employment Commission; Outcome: Not
Qualified.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Human Resource Management
Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution¹

QUALIFICATION RULING

In the matter of the Virginia Employment Commission
Ruling Number 2017-4578
July 5, 2017

The grievant has requested a ruling from the Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution (“EEDR”) at the Department of Human Resource Management (“DHRM”) on whether her April 19, 2017 grievance with the Virginia Employment Commission (the “agency”) qualifies for a hearing. For the reasons discussed below, this grievance does not qualify for a hearing.

FACTS

The grievant is employed by the agency as an Information Technology Specialist II. On or about April 14, 2017, the grievant received an interim performance evaluation. That evaluation rated the grievant as a “Below Contributor” performer on several of her job responsibilities.² The evaluation did not contain an overall performance rating, but did note that her areas of “Below Contributor” performance were “expect[ed] . . . to be brought up to a Contributor rating” The grievant initiated a grievance challenging the interim evaluation on April 19, 2017. After proceeding through the management resolution steps, the grievance was not qualified for a hearing by the agency head. The grievant now appeals that determination to EEDR.

DISCUSSION

Although state employees with access to the grievance procedure may generally grieve anything related to their employment, only certain grievances qualify for a hearing.³ Additionally, the grievance statutes and procedure reserve to management the exclusive right to manage the affairs and operations of state government.⁴ Claims relating to issues such as the methods, means and personnel by which work activities are to be carried out generally do not qualify for a hearing, unless the grievant presents evidence raising a sufficient question as to whether discrimination, retaliation, or discipline may have improperly influenced management’s decision, whether state policy may have been misapplied or unfairly applied or whether a performance evaluation was arbitrary and/or capricious.⁵

¹ Effective January 1, 2017, the Office of Employment Dispute Resolution merged with another office area within the Department of Human Resource Management, the Office of Equal Employment Services. The *Grievance Procedure Manual* has now been updated to reflect this Office’s name post-merger as the Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution.

² The grievant’s performance was rated at the “Contributor” level on those areas of the interim evaluation for which she was not rated as a “Below Contributor.”

³ See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 4.1.

⁴ Va. Code § 2.2-3004(B).

⁵ *Id.* § 2.2-3004(A); *Grievance Procedure Manual* §§ 4.1(b), (c).

Further, the grievance procedure generally limits grievances that qualify for a hearing to those that involve “adverse employment actions.”⁶ Thus, typically the threshold question is whether the grievant has suffered an adverse employment action. An adverse employment action is defined as a “tangible employment action constitut[ing] a significant change in employment status, such as hiring, firing, failing to promote, reassignment with significantly different responsibilities, or a decision causing a significant change in benefits.”⁷ Adverse employment actions include any agency actions that have an adverse effect *on the terms, conditions, or benefits* of one’s employment.⁸

In this instance, the grievant challenges an interim performance evaluation, which is an informal supervisory action akin to a written counseling.⁹ An interim performance evaluation does not generally constitute an adverse employment action because such an action, in and of itself, does not have a significant detrimental effect on the terms, conditions, or benefits of employment.¹⁰ Therefore, the grievant’s claims relating to her receipt of the interim performance evaluation do not qualify for a hearing.¹¹

While the interim performance evaluation has not had an adverse impact on the grievant’s employment, it could be used later to support an adverse employment action against the grievant. Should the interim performance evaluation grieved in this instance later serve to support an adverse employment action against the grievant, such as a formal Written Notice or a “Below Contributor” annual performance rating, this ruling does not prevent the grievant from attempting to contest the merits of these allegations through a subsequent grievance challenging the related adverse employment action.

EEDR’s qualification rulings are final and nonappealable.¹²



Christopher M. Grab
Director
Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution

⁶ See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 4.1(b).

⁷ *Burlington Indus., Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742, 761 (1998).

⁸ *Holland v. Wash. Homes, Inc.*, 487 F.3d 208, 219 (4th Cir. 2007) (citation omitted).

⁹ See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 4.1(c); see, e.g., EDR Ruling No. 2015-4150.

¹⁰ See *Boone v. Goldin*, 178 F.3d 253, 256 (4th Cir. 1999).

¹¹ Although this grievance does not qualify for an administrative hearing under the grievance process, the grievant may have additional rights under the Virginia Government Data Collection and Dissemination Practices Act (the “Act”). Under the Act, if the grievant gives notice that she wishes to challenge, correct, or explain information contained in agency files, the agency shall conduct an investigation regarding the information challenged, and if the information in dispute is not corrected or purged or the dispute is otherwise not resolved, allow the grievant to file a statement of not more than 200 words setting forth her position regarding the information. Va. Code § 2.2-3806(A)(5). This “statement of dispute” shall accompany the disputed information in any subsequent dissemination or use of the information in question. *Id.*

¹² See Va. Code § 2.2-1202.1(5).