

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: April 2, 2014;
Ruling No. 2014-3855; Agency: Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental
Services; Outcome: Grievant Not in Compliance.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Human Resource Management
Office of Employment Dispute Resolution

COMPLIANCE RULING

In the matter of the Department of
Behavioral Health and Developmental Services
Ruling Number 2014-3855
April 2, 2014

The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (the “agency”) has requested a compliance ruling from the Office of Employment Dispute Resolution (“EDR”) at the Department of Human Resource Management in relation to the grievant’s December 12, 2013 grievance. The agency alleges that the grievant has failed to comply with the time limits set forth in the grievance procedure for advancing or concluding her grievance.

FACTS

On or about December 12, 2013, the grievant initiated a grievance with the agency.¹ The first step response was mailed to the grievant on December 16, 2013 and received by the grievant on December 18, 2013. Having received no further response from the grievant, on or about January 15, 2014, the agency mailed, by certified mail, a notice of noncompliance to her. In its notice of noncompliance, the agency requested a response from the grievant within five workdays of her receipt of the notice. The certified mail receipt indicates that the notice of noncompliance was delivered on January 17, 2014. Since more than five workdays have elapsed since the agency notified the grievant of her alleged noncompliance, and the grievant has not yet advanced or concluded her grievance, the agency seeks a compliance ruling allowing it to administratively close the grievance.

DISCUSSION

The grievance procedure requires both parties to address procedural noncompliance through a specific process.² That process assures that the parties first communicate with each other about the noncompliance, and resolve any compliance problems voluntarily, without EDR’s involvement. Specifically, the party claiming noncompliance must notify the other party in writing and allow five workdays for the opposing party to correct any noncompliance.³ If the

¹ The grievant apparently initially initiated her grievance on December 5, 2013, using an expedited grievance form. She apparently subsequently resubmitted her grievance using the regular Form A on December 12, 2013.

² *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

³ *See id.*

opposing party fails to correct the noncompliance within this five-day period, the party claiming noncompliance may seek a compliance ruling from EDR, who may in turn order the party to correct the noncompliance or, in cases of substantial noncompliance, render a decision against the noncomplying party on any qualifiable issue. When an EDR ruling finds that either party to a grievance is in noncompliance, the ruling will (i) order the noncomplying party to correct its noncompliance within a specified time period, and (ii) provide that if the noncompliance is not timely corrected, a decision in favor of the other party will be rendered on any qualifiable issue, unless the noncomplying party can show just cause for the delay in conforming to EDR's order.⁴

In this case, the grievant appears to have failed to advance or conclude her grievance within five workdays of receiving the agency's first resolution step response, as required by the grievance procedure.⁵ Moreover, the agency notified the grievant of her noncompliance and the grievant has not advanced or concluded the grievance.

As the grievant has apparently failed to advance or conclude her grievance in a timely manner, she has failed to comply with the grievance procedure. We therefore order the grievant to correct her noncompliance **within ten workdays of the date of this ruling** by notifying her human resources office in writing that she wishes either to conclude the grievance or submit the grievance form and documentation to the second step-respondent to continue with the grievance. If she does not, the agency may administratively close the grievance without any further action on its part. The grievance may be reopened only upon a timely showing by the grievant of just cause for the delay (for example, a serious illness, or other circumstances beyond the grievant's control).

EDR's rulings on matters of compliance are final and nonappealable.⁶



Christopher M. Grab
Director
Office of Employment Dispute Resolution

⁴ While in cases of substantial noncompliance with procedural rules the grievance statutes grant EDR the authority to render a decision on a qualifiable issue against a noncompliant party, EDR favors having grievances decided on the merits rather than procedural violations. Thus, EDR will *typically* order noncompliance corrected before rendering a decision against a noncompliant party. However, where a party's noncompliance appears driven by bad faith or a gross disregard of the grievance procedure, EDR will exercise its authority to rule against the party without first ordering the noncompliance to be corrected.

⁵ See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 3.1.

⁶ See Va. Code §§ 2.2-1202.1(5), 2.2-3003(G).