

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: February 6, 2015; Ruling No. 2015-4095; Agency: Department of Corrections; 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 Corrections
Ruling Number 2015-4095
February 6, 2015

The Department of Corrections (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 4, 2014 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 4, 2014, the grievant initiated a grievance with the agency. The first step response was mailed to the grievant on or about December 29.¹ Having received no further response from the grievant, on or about January 28, 2015 the agency emailed a notice of noncompliance to the grievant. The email’s tracking information indicates that the grievant opened the email the following day, January 29. 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 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

¹ The first step response was initially mailed to the grievant by certified mail on or about December 11. It was returned to the agency as undeliverable because the address was incorrect. The agency then mailed the first step response to the grievant’s correct address on or about December 29. It appears that the grievant has acknowledged to the agency that she received the first step response.

² *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

³ *See id.*

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 her 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 proceed to the second step. 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



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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).