

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: August 13, 2013; Ruling No. 2014-3672; Agency: Department of Social 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 Social Services
Ruling Number 2014-3672
August 13, 2013

The Department of Social Services (“agency”) has requested a compliance ruling related to the grievant’s May 24, 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 his grievance.

FACTS

On or about May 24, 2013, the grievant initiated a grievance with the agency. On or about June 26, 2013, the agency mailed the third resolution step response to the grievant via first-class and certified U.S. mail. On July 17, 2013, having received no response from the grievant, the agency mailed a letter of noncompliance to him by first-class and certified mail. Additionally, the agency requested a response from the grievant within five workdays upon receipt of the noncompliance letter, and indicated the agency would seek to administratively close the grievance if no response was received. It appears that the certified mailing was received on July 2, 2013, by the grievant.

Since more than five workdays have elapsed since the agency’s notification to the grievant of his alleged noncompliance, and the grievant has not yet advanced or concluded his grievance, the agency seeks a compliance ruling allowing it to administratively close the grievance. The grievant has, since notified of the Office of Employment Dispute Resolution’s (EDR’s) receipt of the ruling request, indicated that he has mailed back the Grievance Form A to the agency with the intention of advancing his grievance.

DISCUSSION

The grievance procedure requires both parties to address procedural noncompliance through a specific process.¹ 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.² If the

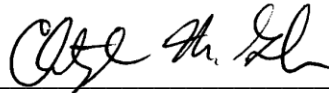
¹ *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

² *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.³

In this case, the grievant appears to have failed to advance or conclude his grievance within five workdays of receiving the third-step response, as required by the grievance procedure.⁴ However, he has also indicated that he has corrected any noncompliance by returning the Grievance Form A to the agency. If the agency has not received written notification that the grievant wishes to either advance or conclude the grievance **within ten work days of the date of this ruling**, it 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.⁵



Christopher M. Grab
Director
Office of Employment Dispute Resolution

³ 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.

⁴ See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 3.3.

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