

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: July 18, 2014;  
Ruling No. 2015-3941, 2015-3942, 2015-3943; 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 Numbers 2015-3941, 2015-3942, 2015-3943  
July 18, 2014

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 March 17, 2014, June 3, 2014, and June 5, 2014 grievances. 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 grievances.

FACTS

The grievant initiated three separate grievances with the agency on or about March 17, 2014, June 3, 2014, and June 5, 2014, respectively. The second step responses to the March 17 and June 3 grievances were issued to the grievant on or about June 12. The first step response to the June 5 grievance was issued on or about June 13. Having received no response from the grievant on the three grievance forms indicating whether she wished to advance or conclude the grievances, on or about June 27, 2014, the agency mailed, by certified mail, a notice of noncompliance to the grievant’s representative.<sup>1</sup> 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 July 2. As more than five workdays have elapsed since the grievant received notice of her alleged noncompliance and she 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> On or about June 23, 2014, the grievant informed the agency that all correspondence for her should be directed to her representative. It also appears that the agency mailed a copy of the notice of noncompliance to the grievant, although there is no certified mail receipt to indicate if and when the grievant received it.

<sup>2</sup> *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

in writing and allow five workdays for the opposing party to correct any noncompliance.<sup>3</sup> 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 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.<sup>4</sup>

In this case, the grievant appears to have failed to advance or conclude her grievances within five workdays of receiving the agency's step responses, as required by the grievance procedure.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the agency notified the grievant of her noncompliance and she has not advanced or concluded her grievances.

As the grievant has apparently failed to advance or conclude her grievances 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 any or all of the three grievances or proceed to the next step for any or all of the three grievances. If she does not, the agency may administratively close the grievances without any further action on its part. The grievances 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.<sup>6</sup>



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Christopher M. Grab  
Director  
Office of Employment Dispute Resolution

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<sup>3</sup> See *id.*

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> See *Grievance Procedure Manual* §§ 3.1, 3.2.

<sup>6</sup> See Va. Code §§ 2.2-1202.1(5), 2.2-3003(G).