

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: November 20, 2014; Ruling No. 2015-4045; Agency: University of Virginia; 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 University of Virginia
Ruling Number 2015-4045
November 20, 2014

The University of Virginia (the “University”) 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 September 22, 2014 grievance. The University 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 September 22, 2014, the grievant initiated an expedited grievance with the University. The second step response was issued to the grievant on or about October 9. Having received no further response from the grievant, on or about October 30, 2014, the University sent, by email and certified mail, a notice of noncompliance to him. In its notice of noncompliance, the University requested a response from the grievant within five workdays of his receipt of the notice. The University has informed EDR that the certified mail receipt indicates the notice of noncompliance was delivered on November 1.¹ As more than five workdays have elapsed since the grievant received notice of his alleged noncompliance and he has not yet advanced or concluded his grievance, the University 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 For purposes of this ruling, we will assume the grievant received the University’s emailed notice of noncompliance because there is nothing to indicate that it may have been sent to an incorrect email address or was otherwise improperly addressed. *Cf., e.g.,* Washington v. Anderson, 236 Va. 316, 322, 373 S.E.2d 712, 715 (1988) (holding that the mailing of correspondence, properly addressed and stamped, raises a presumption of receipt of the correspondence by the addressee).

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 his grievance within five workdays of receiving the University's second resolution step response, as required by the grievance procedure.⁵ Moreover, the University notified the grievant of his noncompliance and he has not advanced or concluded her grievance.

As the grievant has apparently failed to advance or conclude his grievance in a timely manner, he has failed to comply with the grievance procedure. We therefore order the grievant to correct his noncompliance **within ten workdays of the date of this ruling** by notifying his human resources office in writing that he wishes either to conclude the grievance or request qualification from the agency head. If he does not, the University 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* § 3.4.

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