

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure: 5-Day Rule; Ruling Date: September 4, 2007; Ruling #2008-1787; Agency: Virginia Department of Transportation; Outcome: Grievant Not In Compliance.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Employment Dispute Resolution

COMPLIANCE RULING OF DIRECTOR

In the matter of the Department of Transportation
Ruling Number 2008-1787
September 4, 2007

The Department of Transportation (VDOT or the agency) seeks to administratively close the grievant's June 11, 2007 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 June 11, 2007, the grievant initiated an expedited grievance challenging her receipt of a Group III Written Notice with demotion for her alleged violation of the drug and alcohol policy. On or about July 10, 2007, the agency sent the grievant the second management resolution step response via certified and regular U.S. mail.¹ Because the grievant never advanced or concluded her grievance, on July 25, 2007, the agency sent to the grievant a notice of noncompliance via certified and regular U.S. mail. According to United States Postal Service (USPS) tracking receipt, the USPS left notice of the noncompliance letter at the grievant's home address on July 26, 2007.² Presumably, the first class mail versions of the second step response and the notice of noncompliance have already been received at the grievant's address. Because more than five workdays have elapsed since the grievant's alleged receipt of the notice of noncompliance letter and the grievant has not yet cured the non-compliance, the agency seeks a compliance ruling.

DISCUSSION

The grievance procedure requires both parties to address procedural noncompliance through a specific process.³ That process assures that the parties first communicate with each other about the noncompliance, and resolve any compliance

¹ The certified mail was returned to the agency as unclaimed on August 1, 2007.

² The certified mail was returned to the agency as unclaimed on August 11, 2007.

³ *Grievance Procedure Manual*, § 6.3.

problems voluntarily, without this Department's (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.⁴ If the opposing party fails to correct the noncompliance within this five-day period, the party claiming noncompliance may seek a compliance ruling from the EDR Director, 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 its delay in conforming to EDR's order.⁵

In this case, the grievant has failed to advance or conclude her grievance within five workdays of her apparent receipt of the second management resolution step response. Moreover, the agency appears to have notified the grievant of her noncompliance, but the grievant has not advanced or concluded her grievance.

As the grievant has failed to advance or conclude her grievance in a timely manner, she has failed to comply with the grievance procedure. This Department therefore orders the grievant to correct her noncompliance **within ten workdays of the date of this ruling** by either concluding her grievance or advancing it to the agency head for a qualification for hearing determination. 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).

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

Claudia T. Farr
Director

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ While in cases of substantial noncompliance with procedural rules the grievance statutes grant the EDR Director the authority to render a decision on a qualifiable issue against a noncompliant party, this Department favors having grievances decided on the merits rather than procedural violations. Thus, the EDR Director 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, this Department will exercise its authority to rule against the party without first ordering the noncompliance to be corrected.

⁶ *See* Va. Code § 2.2-1001(5).