

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: July 7, 2008; Ruling #2008-2050; Agency: Virginia Military Institute; Outcome: Grievant Not In Compliance.



*COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA*  
*Department of Employment Dispute Resolution*

**COMPLIANCE RULING OF DIRECTOR**

In the matter of Virginia Military Institute  
Ruling No. 2008-2050  
July 7, 2008

The Virginia Military Institute (the Institute) seeks to administratively close the grievant's April 27, 2008 grievance. The Institute 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

The grievant initiated his grievance, dated April 27, 2008, to challenge his termination. The second step-respondent provided a written response to the grievance dated May 6, 2008, which the grievant, according to the Institute, received on May 18, 2008. However, the grievant has failed to return the grievance package to the Institute to advance or conclude the grievance. Because the grievant never advanced or concluded his grievance within five workdays of receiving the second step response, the Institute mailed the grievant a notice of noncompliance on May 22, 2008. The letter was delivered to the recipient's address on May 28, 2008. Because more than five workdays have elapsed since the receipt of the notice of noncompliance letter, and the grievant has not yet cured the noncompliance, the Institute seeks a compliance ruling.

DISCUSSION

The grievance procedure requires both parties to address procedural noncompliance through a specific process.<sup>1</sup> That process assures that the parties first communicate with each other about the noncompliance, and resolve any compliance 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.<sup>2</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 the EDR Director, who may in turn order the party to correct the noncompliance or, in cases of substantial noncompliance,

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<sup>1</sup> *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

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>3</sup>

In this case, the grievant has failed to advance or conclude his grievance within five workdays of receiving the second resolution step response. Moreover, the Institute appears to have notified the grievant of his noncompliance, but the grievant has not advanced or concluded the grievance.

As the grievant has failed to advance or conclude his grievance in a timely manner, he has failed to comply with the grievance procedure.<sup>4</sup> This Department therefore orders the grievant to correct his noncompliance **within ten workdays of the date of this ruling** by notifying the Institute's human resources office in writing that he wishes to either conclude the grievance or request qualification of his grievance for a hearing from the Superintendent. If he does not, the Institute 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.<sup>5</sup>

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Claudia T. Farr  
Director

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 2.4.

<sup>5</sup> See Va. Code § 2.2-1001(5), 2.2-3003(G).