

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: October 25, 2011; Ruling No. 2012-3130; Agency: University of Virginia; Outcome: Grievant Not in Compliance.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Employment Dispute Resolution

COMPLIANCE RULING OF DIRECTOR

In the matter of the University of Virginia
Ruling No. 2012-3130
October 25, 2011

The University of Virginia (the agency) seeks to administratively close the grievant's July 8, 2011 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

The grievant initiated a grievance on or about July 8, 2011. On or about August 12, 2011, the agency sent the grievant a letter in which it offered her relief. The August 12th letter further instructed that if the grievant was satisfied with the proposed relief, she should conclude her grievance and, if not satisfied, the second step meeting could be scheduled. When the grievant apparently did not respond to the August 12th letter, the agency sent a follow-up letter on August 29, 2011, instructing the grievant to either advance or conclude her grievance. Because more than five workdays have elapsed since the grievant's apparent receipt of the August 29th instruction to advance or conclude her grievance, and the grievant has done either, the agency now seeks a compliance ruling.

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 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.² 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

¹ *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

² *See Id.*

(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 her grievance within five workdays of presumably receiving the agency's offer of relief and the invitation to schedule the second step meeting, should the proposed relief be deemed insufficient. Moreover, the agency appears to have notified the grievant of her failure to advance or conclude her grievance, but she has done neither.

As the grievant has apparently 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 work days of the date of this ruling** by notifying her human resources office in writing that she wishes either to conclude her grievance or advance the grievance to the second step meeting. If she does neither, 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.⁴

Claudia T. Farr
Director

³ 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.

⁴ See Va. Code §§ 2.2-1001(5); 2.2-3003(G).