



U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

Office of Federal Operations

P.O. Box 77960

Washington, DC 20013

[REDACTED]
Darin B,¹
Complainant,

v.

Louis DeJoy,
Postmaster General,
United States Postal Service
(Field Areas and Regions),
Agency.

Appeal No. 2024004267

Agency No. 4E-852-0106-24

DECISION

Complainant filed an appeal with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC or Commission) from the Agency's decision dated July 1, 2024, dismissing his complaint of unlawful employment discrimination in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), as amended, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq., Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended, 29 U.S.C. § 791 et seq., and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), as amended, 29 U.S.C. § 621 et seq.

ISSUES PRESENTED

Whether the Agency's final decision properly dismissed Complainant's formal complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1614.107(a)(1).

¹ This case has been randomly assigned a pseudonym which will replace Complainant's name when the decision is published to non-parties and the Commission's website.

BACKGROUND

At the time of events giving rise to this complaint, Complainant worked as a Letter Carrier, Level 01-P, at the Agency's Buckeye Post Office facility in Buckeye, Arizona.

On June 7, 2024, Complainant filed a formal complaint alleging that the Agency subjected him to a hostile work environment and discrimination on the bases of race (Hispanic), sex (male), color (Black), disability (perceived mental disability), age (68), and reprisal for prior protected EEO activity when:

1. On or around April 5, 2024, Complainant's supervisor asked her when she will be retiring, told her that he likes her route, that he can do the route in less than 8 hours, and "You can file another EEO-I don't care"; and,
2. On or around April 22, 2024, management instructed Complainant to provide medical documentation prior to returning to work.

On July 1, 2024, the Agency issued a final decision dismissing the complaint pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1614.107(a)(1) for failure to state a claim. With regard to Claim 1, the Agency found Complainant failed to establish that she was aggrieved as she did not suffer a personal loss or harm with respect to a term, condition, or privilege of employment. With regard to Claim 2, the Agency viewed the request for medical documentation as a singular, distinct event for which Complainant failed to establish he suffered a personal loss or harm with respect to a term, condition, or privilege of employment.

Complainant filed the instant appeal.

CONTENTIONS ON APPEAL

On appeal, Complainant contends the final decision contained legal and factual errors. Complainant alleged the ongoing events the Agency subjected him to constitute a claim of discrimination and harassment, specifically the Agency's change in his work status and arbitrary requirement for medical documentation followed by its decision to allow him to return without the documentation a week later.

The Agency provides no response to Complainant's appeal.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

The Agency's decision to dismiss a complaint is subject to de novo review by the Commission, which requires the Commission to examine the record without regard to the factual and legal determinations of the previous decision maker and issue its decision based on the Commission's own assessment of the record and its interpretation of the law. 29 C.F.R. § 1614.405(a). The Commission should construe the complaint in the light most favorable to the complainant and take the complaint's allegations as true. See Cobb v. Department of the Treasury, EEOC Request No. 05970077 (March 13, 1997). Thus, all reasonable inferences that may be drawn from the complaint's allegations must be made in favor of the complainant.

ANALYSIS

Upon review of Complainant's formal complaint and pre-complaint documents, we find that he is alleging a hostile work environment claim. In Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc., 510 U.S. 17, 21 (1993), the Supreme Court reaffirmed the holding of Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57, 67 (1986), that harassment is actionable if it is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the complainant's employment. The Court explained that an "objectively hostile or abusive work environment [is created when] a reasonable person would find [it] hostile or abusive:" and the complainant subjectively perceives it as such. Harris, supra at 21-22. Thus, not all claims of harassment are actionable. Where a complaint does not challenge an agency action or inaction regarding a specific term, condition or privilege of employment, a claim of harassment is actionable only if, allegedly, the harassment to which the complainant has been subjected was sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the complainant's employment.

"A complaint should not be dismissed for failure to state a claim unless it appears beyond doubt that the complainant can prove no set of facts in support of the claim which would entitle the complainant to relief. Thus, a claim of harassment...should not be dismissed for failure to state a claim where the complainant has made factual allegations which, when construed in the light most favorable to the complainant, i.e., when considered together and treated as true, are sufficient to state a claim." See Cobb v. Department of the Treasury, EEOC Request No. 05970077 (March 13, 1997).

We find that the Agency improperly dismissed Complainant's Claims 1 and 2 of his complaint for failure to state a claim. Complainant is alleging, among other things, that based on his protected classes an Agency official criticized his work, pressured him to retire, caused sufficient stress for him to leave work, his work status was administratively changed and ultimately prevented him from returning to work without medical documentation. We find, when viewed collectively, the alleged incidents are sufficiently severe or pervasive to set forth an actionable claim of harassment.

With regard to Claim 2, the Agency noted prior a Commission decision finding a singular request for medical documentation did not constitute a viable claim of discrimination. See Richardson v. U.S. Postal Service, EEOC Appeal No. 0120071425 (September 30, 2008). Citing Richardson the Agency noted:

The request for medical documentation was a single, isolated event, and was not part of an ongoing series of actions constituting a pattern of discriminatory harassment. Furthermore, a request for documentation does not rise to the level of severity which would render complainant aggrieved under *Harris, supra.*" See also, *Ness v. U.S. Postal Service*, EEOC Appeal No. 01981368 (November 27, 2000).

Based on this, the Agency dismissed Claim 2 for failure to state a claim. However, a fair reading of Complainant's formal complaint establishes the series of events starting on April 5th (Claim 1) and ending on April 29, 2024, when he was able to return to work. Complainant alleged he left work the same day as Claim 1 events due to "stress" then attempted to return to work, only to be told he could not without medical documentation. Complainant also stated in his formal complaint that the Agency place him on "Clearance Required" status in the interim with him ultimately able to return to work without medical documentation on April 29, 2024. A plain reading of his complaint shows Complainant has shown an injury or harm to a term, condition, or privilege of employment for which there is a remedy. See Diaz v. Dep't of the Air Force, EEOC Request No. 05931049 (April 21, 1994).

Turning to Claim 1, as Complainant alleged in his formal complaint, the events of Claim 1 were the start of the Agency's retaliatory and harassing behavior towards him. While the Agency, in its final decision, asserts that the formal complaint was comprised of two distinct matters, when viewing the record in the light most favorable to Complainant, we determine that the alleged incidents appears to be an ongoing, continuous issue.

Given the specific circumstance of this case as noted above, and viewing the record in the light most favorable to Complainant, we find that he is alleging that such purported actions are motivated by his protected status and in retaliation for prior protected EEO activity. Therefore, the Commission finds that Complainant's Claims 1 and 2 were improperly dismissed pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1614.107(a)(1) for failure to state a claim.

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, the Agency's final decision dismissing Complainant's complaint is vacated. The complaint is hereby remanded to the Agency for further processing in accordance with this decision and the Order below.

ORDER (E0224)

The Agency is ordered to process the remanded claims in accordance with 29 C.F.R. § 1614.108. The Agency shall acknowledge to the Complainant that it has received the remanded claims **within thirty (30) calendar days** of the date this decision was issued. The Agency shall issue to Complainant a copy of the investigative file and also shall notify Complainant of the appropriate rights **within one hundred fifty (150) calendar days** of the date this decision was issued, unless the matter is otherwise resolved prior to that time. If the Complainant requests a final decision without a hearing, the Agency shall issue a final decision **within sixty (60) days** of receipt of Complainant's request.

As provided in the statement entitled "Implementation of the Commission's Decision," the Agency must send to the Compliance Officer: 1) a copy of the Agency's letter of acknowledgment to Complainant, 2) a copy of the Agency's notice that transmits the investigative file and notice of rights, and 3) either a copy of the complainant's request for a hearing, or a copy of the final agency decision ("FAD") if Complainant does not request a hearing.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMISSION'S DECISION (K0719)

Under 29 C.F.R. § 1614.405(c) and § 1614.502, compliance with the Commission's corrective action is mandatory. Within seven (7) calendar days of the completion of each ordered corrective action, the Agency shall submit via the Federal Sector EEO Portal (FedSEP) supporting documents in the digital format required by the Commission, referencing the compliance docket number under which compliance was being monitored.

Once all compliance is complete, the Agency shall submit via FedSEP a final compliance report in the digital format required by the Commission. See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.403(g). The Agency's final report must contain supporting documentation when previously not uploaded, and the Agency must send a copy of all submissions to the Complainant and his/her representative.

If the Agency does not comply with the Commission's order, the Complainant may petition the Commission for enforcement of the order. 29 C.F.R. § 1614.503(a). The Complainant also has the right to file a civil action to enforce compliance with the Commission's order prior to or following an administrative petition for enforcement. See 29 C.F.R. §§ 1614.407, 1614.408, and 29 C.F.R. § 1614.503(g). Alternatively, the Complainant has the right to file a civil action on the underlying complaint in accordance with the paragraph below entitled "Right to File a Civil Action." 29 C.F.R. §§ 1614.407 and 1614.408. A civil action for enforcement or a civil action on the underlying complaint is subject to the deadline stated in 42 U.S.C. 2000e-16(c) (1994 & Supp. IV 1999). **If the Complainant files a civil action, the administrative processing of the complaint, including any petition for enforcement, will be terminated.** See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.409.

Failure by an agency to either file a compliance report or implement any of the orders set forth in this decision, without good cause shown, may result in the referral of this matter to the Office of Special Counsel pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1614.503(f) for enforcement by that agency.

STATEMENT OF RIGHTS - ON APPEAL
RECONSIDERATION (M0124.1)

The Commission may, in its discretion, reconsider this appellate decision if Complainant or the Agency submits a written request that contains arguments or evidence that tend to establish that:

1. The appellate decision involved a clearly erroneous interpretation of material fact or law; or
2. The appellate decision will have a substantial impact on the policies, practices, or operations of the agency.

Requests for reconsideration must be filed with EEOC's Office of Federal Operations (OFO) **within thirty (30) calendar days** of receipt of this decision. If the party requesting reconsideration elects to file a statement or brief in support of the request, **that statement or brief must be filed together with the request for reconsideration.**

A party shall have **twenty (20) calendar days** from receipt of another party's request for reconsideration within which to submit a brief or statement in opposition. See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.405; Equal Employment Opportunity Management Directive for 29 C.F.R. Part 1614 (EEO MD-110), at Chap. 9 § VII.B (Aug. 5, 2015).

Complainant should submit their request for reconsideration, and any statement or brief in support of their request, via the EEOC Public Portal, which can be found at

<https://publicportal.eeoc.gov/Portal/Login.aspx>

Alternatively, Complainant can submit their request and arguments to the Director, Office of Federal Operations, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, via regular mail addressed to P.O. Box 77960, Washington, DC 20013, or by certified mail addressed to 131 M Street, NE, Washington, DC 20507. In the absence of a legible postmark, a complainant's request to reconsider shall be deemed timely filed if OFO receives it by mail within five days of the expiration of the applicable filing period. See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.604.

An agency's request for reconsideration must be submitted in digital format via the EEOC's Federal Sector EEO Portal (FedSEP). See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.403(g). Either party's request and/or statement or brief in opposition must also include proof of service on the other party, unless Complainant files their request via the EEOC Public Portal, in which case no proof of service is required.

Failure to file within the 30-day time period will result in dismissal of the party's request for reconsideration as untimely, unless extenuating circumstances prevented the timely filing of the request. **Any supporting documentation must be submitted together with the request for reconsideration.** The Commission will consider requests for reconsideration filed after the deadline only in very limited circumstances. See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.604(f).

COMPLAINANT'S RIGHT TO FILE A CIVIL ACTION (R0124)


This is a decision requiring the Agency to continue its administrative processing of your complaint. However, if you wish to file a civil action, you have the right to file such action in an appropriate United States District Court **within ninety (90) calendar days** from the date that you receive this decision.

In the alternative, you may file a civil action **after one hundred and eighty (180) calendar days** of the date you filed your complaint with the Agency, or filed your appeal with the Commission. If you file a civil action, you must name as the defendant in the complaint the person who is the official Agency head or department head, identifying that person by their full name and official title. Failure to do so may result in the dismissal of your case in court. "Agency" or "department" means the national organization, and not the local office, facility or department in which you work. **Filing a civil action will terminate the administrative processing of your complaint.**

RIGHT TO REQUEST COUNSEL (Z0815)

If you want to file a civil action but cannot pay the fees, costs, or security to do so, you may request permission from the court to proceed with the civil action without paying these fees or costs. Similarly, if you cannot afford an attorney to represent you in the civil action, you may request the court to appoint an attorney for you. **You must submit the requests for waiver of court costs or appointment of an attorney directly to the court, not the Commission.** The court has the sole discretion to grant or deny these types of requests. Such requests do not alter the time limits for filing a civil action (please read the paragraph titled Complainant's Right to File a Civil Action for the specific time limits).

FOR THE COMMISSION:


Carlton M. Hadden, Director
Office of Federal Operations

January 13, 2025
Date