



U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
Office of Federal Operations
P.O. Box 77960
Washington, DC 20013

[REDACTED]
Earlie P.,¹
Complainant,

v.

Denis R. McDonough,
Secretary,
Department of Veterans Affairs,
Agency.

Appeal No. 2022000915

Agency No. 200I-0626-2021104848

DECISION

Complainant filed a timely appeal with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC or Commission) from the Agency's final decision dated November 8, 2021, dismissing a formal complaint alleging 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.

BACKGROUND

During the period at issue, Complainant worked as a Nurse Practitioner, VN-3, at the Agency's Tennessee Valley Healthcare System in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

On July 22, 2021, Complainant initiated EEO Counselor contact. During counseling, Complainant alleged that on July 16, 2021, a meeting was conducted between herself, a physician (identified herein as Dr. H), and Dr. H's manager (identified as Dr. R). The meeting was to address ongoing concerns between Complainant and Dr. H. Complainant claimed that Dr. H continually micromanaged her, disrespected her authority, and provided inaccurate feedback and comments regarding Complainant's work performance and interaction with

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.

patients. Complainant alleged that Dr H. did not treat other team members in the same way that Dr H. interacts with her. Complainant noted that she is the only African American on a six-person team. Informal efforts to resolve Complainant's concerns were unsuccessful.

On November 1, 2021, Complainant filed a formal complaint alleging that the Agency subjected her to discrimination on the bases of race, sex, color, disability, and age when:

1. On June 22, 2021, the "Admissions Coordinator" informed Complainant she had received different medical advice from Dr H than the advice Complainant provided.
2. On July 2, 2021, Dr. H sent Complainant an email and included the Registered Nurse, Chief of Psychiatry, Assistant Chief of Psychiatry; and two named Physicians.
3. On or about July 2, 2021, the Dr. H wrote a Report of Contact regarding Complainant.
4. On July 14, 2021, Dr. H accused Complainant of "dishonesty" regarding a patient issue.
5. On July 16, 2021, Dr. H. shared a patient incident with Complainant's supervisors.

On November 8, 2021, the Agency issued a final decision dismissing allegations 1 – 4 based on its reasoning the alleged events identified in these claims were not the subject of EEO counseling, and could not be considered like or related to the matter for which Complainant underwent EEO counseling (allegation 5). The Agency then considered allegation 5 on its own and dismissed it for failure to state a claim.

The instant appeal followed.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

EEOC Regulation 29 C.F.R. 1614.107(a)(2) provides, in part, that the agency shall dismiss a complaint or a portion of a complaint that raises a matter that has not been brought to the attention of an EEO Counselor and is not like or related to a matter that has been brought to the attention of an EEO Counselor.

We determine that allegations 1 – 5 are like or related to the matter for which Complainant underwent EEO counseling. To wit, when reading the complaint in conjunction with the related EEO counseling report, it is clear that the essence of Complainant's claim, both during counseling and in her formal complaint, is that she has been subjected on ongoing discriminatory harassment by Dr. H. All of the alleged factual incidents in the formal complaint are examples of this pattern of harassment and are tied together with a common theme. When all the allegations are considered together, we conclude they state a viable claim of discriminatory harassment that requires investigation and further processing. See Cobb v. Department of the Treasury, EEOC Request No. 05970077 (March 13, 1997).

CONCLUSION

We REVERSE the Agency's final decision dismissing Complainant's formal complaint and REMAND this matter to the Agency for further processing in accordance with the ORDER below.

ORDER (E0618)

The Agency is ordered to process the remanded complaint (now defined as a claim of ongoing discriminatory harassment) in accordance with 29 C.F.R. § 1614.108 et seq. 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, a copy of complainant's request for a FAD, or a statement from the agency that it did not receive a response from complainant by the end of the election period.

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 (M0920)

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 his or her request for reconsideration, and any statement or brief in support of his or her request, via the EEOC Public Portal, which can be found at <https://publicportal.eeoc.gov/Portal/Login.aspx>

Alternatively, Complainant can submit his or her 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 his or her 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(c).

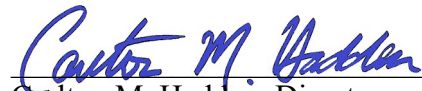
COMPLAINANT'S RIGHT TO FILE A CIVIL ACTION (R0610)

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 his or her 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

March 29, 2022
Date