



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

[REDACTED]
Karlene P.,¹
Complainant,

v.

Denis R. McDonough,
Secretary,
Department of Veterans Affairs
(Veterans Health Administration),
Agency.

Appeal No. 2023003543

Agency No. 200I-508-2023-150498

DECISION

Complainant filed a timely appeal with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC or Commission) from the Agency's final decision dated May 2, 2023, 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., and Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended, 29 U.S.C. § 791 et seq.

BACKGROUND

During the period, Complainant worked as an Advanced Medical Support Assistant, Grade GS-6, at the Agency's Community Out-Based Clinic in Decatur, Georgia.

On April 4, 2023, Complainant filed a formal complaint alleging that the Agency subjected her to discrimination based on sex and disability when:

- 1) On April 1, 2021, Registered Nurse, was "disrespectful, demanding, and intimidating" toward Complainant and called her an "aggressive female".

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.

- 2) On May 26, 2021, a prior Supervisor met with Complainant to discuss Complainant's reports of "disrespectful" treatment from Registered Nurse, but his behavior continued.
- 3) On September 22, 2022, Complainant's next Supervisor, directed Complainant to start "tracking Registered Nurse's behavior".
- 4) On October 14, 2022, Registered Nurse contacted Complainant multiple times and requested she deviate from the new procedure for processing walk-in patients.
- 5) On February 1, 2023, Registered Nurse "barged" into Complainant's work area and began "violently" opening and closing file cabinet drawers looking for scissors.

On May 2, 2023, 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. Specifically, the Agency determined that Complainant's claims did not rise to the level of severe or pervasive as necessary to state a justiciable harassment claim.

The instant appeal followed. On appeal, Complainant challenged the Agency's dismissal of her claims without an investigation. Complainant described how Registered Nurse's behavior included "sneaking-up" on her in a manner that made her feel cornered and exacerbated the symptoms of PTSD. Complainant further alleges that Registered Nurse's harassment has increased whenever supervision was not present.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The Agency shall accept a complaint from an aggrieved employee who believes that they have been discriminated against by the Agency because of a prohibited consideration or because of retaliation. 29 C.F.R. §§ 1614.103, 1614.106(a). EEOC's federal sector case precedent consistently defines an "aggrieved" as one who suffers a present harm or loss with respect to a term, condition, or privilege of employment for which there is a remedy. Diaz v. Dep't of the Air Force, EEOC Request No. 05931049 (Apr. 21, 1994). If a complainant cannot establish that he is aggrieved, then an agency shall dismiss the complaint for failure to state a claim. 29 C.F.R. § 1614.107(a)(1).

A complaint should not be dismissed for failure to state a claim unless it appears beyond doubt that the complainant cannot prove a set of facts in support of the claim which would entitle him or her to relief. The trier of fact must consider all incidents and remarks together in the light most favorable to a complainant, in order to determine sufficiency to state a claim. Cobb v. Dep't of the Treasury, EEOC Request No. 05970077 (Mar. 13, 1997).

Here, Complainant has alleged that Registered Nurse had disparaged her in the presence of co-workers and then has frequently entered her workspace over multiple occasions between 2021 and the present. Complainant maintained that Registered Nurse has made himself present in her workspace without justification and has a pattern of intimidating and intentionally upsetting her. Complainant asserts that Registered Nurse's behavior remains ongoing despite efforts of two different supervisors to intervene. To state a cognizable claim under EEOC's regulations, it is sufficient for a complainant to have alleged a pattern of harassment. Cervantes v. U.S. Postal Serv., EEOC Request No. 05930303 (Nov. 12, 1993). Complainant has done so here.

CONCLUSION

The Agency's final decision dismissing the formal complaint is REVERSED. Complainant's complaint is REMANDED to the Agency for further processing in accordance with the ORDER below.

ORDER (E0618)

The Agency is ordered to process the remanded claims 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

September 7, 2023

Date