



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

[REDACTED]
Doria D.,¹
Complainant,

v.

Megan J. Brennan,
Postmaster General,
United States Postal Service
(Capital Metro Area),
Agency.

Appeal No. 2019005199

Agency No. 1K-231-0045-19

DECISION

Complainant filed a timely appeal with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC or Commission) from the Agency's final decision dated June 27, 2019, dismissing a formal 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.

BACKGROUND

During the period at issue, Complainant worked for the Agency as a Postal Support Employee at the Agency's Processing and Distribution Center in Sandston, Virginia.

On April 22, 2019, Complainant underwent EEO counseling regarding her termination from Agency employment on April 21, 2019. The EEO Counselor's Report reflects that Complainant alleged discrimination based on race (black), religion (Christian) and sex (female) during counseling.

On May 25, 2019, Complainant filed the instant formal complaint. Complainant claimed that the Agency subjected her to discrimination when she was removed from her position during her probationary period on April 21, 2019.

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.

The form did not indicate a basis on which Complainant alleged she had been discriminated against. Instead, it appears that Complainant drew a box, labeled the drawn box as 'other' and selected it as the basis for the Agency's alleged discriminatory conduct.

In its final decision, the Agency dismissed the complaint in its entirety in accordance with EEOC Regulation 29 C.F.R. §1614.107(a)(1) for failure to state a claim, finding that Complainant did not raise a covered basis in the formal complaint. This appeal followed.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The regulations set forth at 29 C.F.R. §§ 1614.103, 1614.106 require an Agency to accept a complaint from an aggrieved employee or applicant who believes that he has been discriminated against because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disabling condition, or reprisal for prior EEO activities. See also, Odoski v. Dep't of Energy, EEOC Appeal No. 0119901496 (Apr. 16, 1990). An agency shall dismiss a formal complaint that fails to state a claim. 29 C.F.R. § 1614.107(a)(1). To successfully state a claim, a complaint must identify an alleged basis of discrimination (i.e. race, sex, age, national origin, color, religion, disability, and reprisal for prior EEO activity) within the purview of EEO law and regulations. If a complaint fails to clearly identify a covered basis within our jurisdictional purview, then it must be dismissed. See Emmanuel L. v. Dep't of the Air Force, EEOC Appeal No. 0120171680 (Jul. 11, 2017).

The Commission gives broad application to the court's decision in Sanchez v. Standard Brands, Inc., 431 F.2d 455, 465 (5th Cir. 1970). Under Sanchez, complainants are given liberal latitude to clarify the bases of discrimination in their charges, and to add bases of discrimination after filing their charges. The Sanchez court explained that there are at least three reasons why a complainant may fail to identify a basis of discrimination in a complaint. First, a complainant may not be aware of an employer's motivation. Second, a complainant may not fully comprehend the distinction between bases. Finally, a complainant may be unschooled and unsophisticated in the use of forms. Applying Sanchez, the Commission has held that a complainant may amend his or her complaint to add or delete bases without changing the identity of the claim. See, e.g., Dragos v. U.S. Postal Service, EEOC Request No. 05940563 (January 19, 1995).

In the instant case, we acknowledge that Complainant clearly did not check a block for covered bases, on the formal complaint form. However, as we view the record in its entirety, it appears that Complainant raised covered bases, albeit unartfully, in the EEO complaint process. Specifically, the record indicates that in her contact with the EEO Counselor regarding her concerns, Complainant alleged that her removal during her probationary period was based on race, religion and sex, as we noted above. The record further indicates that when informal efforts did not resolve Complainant's concerns, the Agency issued a Notice advising her of the right to file a formal complaint. The Notice also referenced race, (black) religion (Christian) and sex (female) as bases of the alleged discrimination.

Therefore, based on a careful review of the record, we find that the Agency's dismissal of Complainant's complaint for failure to state a claim was improper.

CONCLUSION

The Agency's final decision dismissing Complainant's complaint is REVERSED. The 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 claim in accordance with 29 C.F.R. § 1614.108. The Agency shall acknowledge to the Complainant that it has received the remanded claim **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 (K0618)

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.

STATEMENT OF RIGHTS - ON APPEAL

RECONSIDERATION (M0617)

The Commission may, in its discretion, reconsider the decision in this case if the Complainant or the Agency submits a written request containing arguments or evidence which 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 to reconsider, with supporting statement or brief, must be filed with the Office of Federal Operations (OFO) **within thirty (30) calendar days** of receipt of this decision. A party shall have **twenty (20) calendar days** of receipt of another party's timely request for reconsideration in 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). All requests and arguments must be submitted to the Director, Office of Federal Operations, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Complainant's request may be submitted via regular mail to P.O. Box 77960, Washington, DC 20013, or by certified mail to 131 M Street, NE, Washington, DC 20507. In the absence of a legible postmark, the request to reconsider shall be deemed timely filed if it is received by mail within five days of the expiration of the applicable filing period. See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.604. The agency's request must be submitted in digital format via the EEOC's Federal Sector EEO Portal (FedSEP). See 29 C.F.R. § 1614.403(g). The request or opposition must also include proof of service on the other party.

Failure to file within the time period will result in dismissal of your request for reconsideration as untimely, unless extenuating circumstances prevented the timely filing of the request. Any supporting documentation must be submitted with your 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

November 15, 2019

Date