In reply refer to: 08

January 24, 2024

VIA: **(Delivery Method)** emailaddress3

govcdm\_firstname govcdm\_lastname

govcdm\_address1\_line1 govcdm\_address1\_line2

govcdm\_address1\_city, govcdm\_address1statepicklist govcdm\_address1\_postalcode

**SUBJECT: ADR Prior to the Investigative Stage in the EEO Complaint Case No. govcdm\_name, Filed govcdm\_dateformalcomplaintfiled.**

**DO NOT ISSUE this letter if facility refused ADR during counseling for legitimate reason.**

Dear govcdm\_firstname govcdm\_lastname:

1. Your formal equal employment opportunity (EEO) complaint case no. govcdm\_name is pending assignment to an investigator. During the investigative process, the Investigator will obtain information regarding your requested remedy and discuss with you and management any possible settlement offers. If there is interest in resolution, the Investigator can assist you and management in negotiating a settlement.

2..Alternatively, you and the Agency could participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) prior to the investigation of this complaint. ADR can yield intangible benefits such as improved morale and productivity, reduction in future disputes, repaired relationships, improved customer service, and renewed employee trust. The ADR process used at the Department of Veterans Affairs to address EEO complaints is mediation. The mediation process is flexible and allows you and the Agency to maintain control of the outcome of the complaint versus waiting for a third party to render a decision on the merits of the case. The Investigator assigned to this complaint will contact you to explore your interest in participating in ADR. If you are interested in ADR, the Investigator will contact the appropriate agency official to convey your interest in ADR. If both parties are in agreement, the Investigator will refer the request to the ORMDI ADR Program Manager/Facility ADR Coordinator to obtain mediators and schedule the session.

3. Participation in the mediation process does not diminish your right to continue to pursue the complaint under the discrimination complaint process if resolution efforts are unsuccessful. If both parties are interested in pursuing resolution, we will hold the investigation in abeyance for no less than 30 calendar days and no more than 90 calendar days from the date of the Investigator’s contact. We hope this will allow time for the parties involved to fashion their own resolution through the use of mediation or other ADR techniques. If a resolution is not reached, the Investigator will conduct the investigation in accordance with EEOC regulations.

4. If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this matter, please contact firstname lastname, ORDMI Case Manager at address1\_telephone1 and internalemailaddress. **You are strongly encouraged to use email to submit your correspondence to ORMDI.**

Sincerely,

firstname lastname

District Manager

Enclosure: Mediation Program Information Sheet

**What Is Mediation?**

Mediation is an informal way for employees to address disputes with a fellow employee, manager, or colleague. In mediation, a neutral person called a mediator helps two or more persons explore ways to resolve their differences and reach an agreement that best addresses their interests. Mediation allows the parties to create their own unique solutions, instead of taking the problem to an outside decision-maker and having that person’s solution imposed on them.

Mediation does not focus on who is right and who is wrong. It focuses on forward thinking and solving the problem. The mediator has no authority to make decisions for the parties. The parties decide what is important to each of them and make decisions based on those factors. The mediator helps the parties communicate, make informed decisions by understanding and listening to each other, and work together to create options and acceptable solutions.

**Why Should I Request Mediation?**

While conflict is a natural part of our daily lives, unresolved disputes may become unproductive and negatively impact the work environment. In these instances, mediation can save time and resources for all involved. Mediation can improve communication and prevent future misunderstandings. Mediation provides an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues and concerns in a private setting. Mediation helps the parties to look realistically at the best and worst case alternatives to resolving the dispute, and when possible, develop mutually satisfactory solutions. By agreeing to mediate, neither party gives up any rights to other processes that may be available to address the dispute. Parties can designate a representative to attend the mediation and provide support and advice during the process.

**How Does Mediation Fit Into The EEO Process?**

An individual who has initiated the EEO complaint process may advise an Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion (ORMDI) EEO counselor of his/her interest in mediation as opposed to EEO counseling. The EEO counselor will inquire and find out if the Agency is willing to participate in mediation. If so, the pre-complaint process will be extended for no more than 90 calendar days from the individual’s date of initial contact with the EEO counselor to allow the parties to mediate. If mediation does not resolve the matter, the EEO counselor will advise the individual of his/her right to file a formal EEO complaint.

After a formal EEO complaint has been filed, the complainant may request mediation at any time during the processing of his/her complaint. If the Agency agrees to mediate, the processing of the EEO complaint will be held in abeyance for no more than 90 calendar days from the date of the request to mediate. If the complaint is not resolved in mediation, the EEO complaint process resumes at the point mediation was requested.

**How Do I Begin The Mediation Process?**

The mediation process is initiated by contacting the ORM official assigned to the EEO complaint or ORMDI’s ADR Program Office. If the request does not involve an issue of fraud, waste, abuse, criminal activity, sexual harassment, or removal for cause, the other party involved in the dispute will be contacted to see if (s)he is amenable to mediation. If the other party is willing to mediate the ORMDI ADR Program Office or Facility ADR Coordinator obtains mediators from within VA or another Federal agency, depending on the parties’ preference. In some instances, where a party is a member of the bargaining unit, the union may be notified of and invited to participate in the mediation session.

**What Happens During The Mediation Session?**

Generally, the mediator begins with an introduction, explaining the process, each party’s role, and establishing ground rules. Then, each party is afforded an opportunity to share information about the dispute. The mediator may continue with all parties in a joint session, exploring ways to address the issues raised or the mediator may meet separately with each party in private caucuses. Any information shared only with the mediator will be kept confidential unless permission is given to the mediator to disclose to the other party. If the parties can find common ground and agree to terms, those terms are documented in an agreement.

**What If An Agreement Is Reached?**

A written agreement is drafted and signed by all necessary parties. Once the agreement is signed by all parties, the contract is binding and enforceable. The parties may agree not to disclose the terms of the agreement to those who do not have a need to know; however, the document itself is not confidential and may be disclosed to establish compliance.

**What If An Agreement Is Not Reached?**

If mediation was elected during the EEO complaint process, the process resumes at the point mediation was requested.

**What If I Have More Questions?**

If you would like additional information, please contact the ORMDI ADR Program Office at [workplaceadr@va.gov](mailto:workplaceadr@va.gov).or 800-737-3361, or the ORMDI Case Manager assigned to your complaint.