



U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

Office of Federal Operations

P. O. Box 77960

Washington, D.C. 20013

April 6, 2020

Memorandum

TO: Federal Sector EEO Directors & Officials

FROM: Carlton M. Hadden
Director, Office of Federal Operations

SUBJECT: Processing Information for All Parties in Federal EEO Processing under 29 CFR Part 1614

In light of the National Emergency declared by the President due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Office of Federal Operations (OFO) is issuing the following instructions regarding the processing of federal sector EEO complaints covered by 29 CFR Part 1614.

The EEOC recognizes this crisis affects all federal employees, complainants, and others involved in the EEO process. We appreciate the dedication of federal EEO professionals throughout the federal government and we further recognize that the centerpiece of our efforts are the employees, applicants, and former employees who believe they have experienced employment discrimination and access our regulatory process for assistance. Nevertheless, the federal government remains open and committed to providing mission-critical services to the greatest extent possible, given the limitations inherent in the current environment.

The EEOC also recognizes that, because of the National Emergency, applicants who utilize the EEO complaint process may face challenges that preclude them from meeting the regulatory timeframes set forth in 29 CFR Part 1614.

The EEOC must balance its duty to ensure that the EEO process continues efficiently and effectively, without compromising the safety of federal employees or the rights or safety of complainants and others involved in the EEO process.

The EEOC expects that agencies and employees will continue to process EEO complaints in a timely manner that will best preserve the legal rights of the parties involved, unless doing so would interfere with mission-critical operations for an agency. Accordingly, the Office of Federal Operations is issuing the following instructions, which will remain in effect until further notice:

1. Agencies will continue all counseling, investigations and other complaint processing set forth in 29 CFR Part 1614, except in circumstances meeting the criteria described below.
2. To the extent practicable, regulatory timeframes concerning the processing of federal sector EEO complaints will continue to be met, wherever feasible. For this purpose, practicable means where the agency and complainant have access to needed witnesses, documents and representation, and where such processing will not interfere with the mission-critical operations of the agency.
3. The regulatory timeframes set forth in 29 C.F.R. Part 1614 will be subject to the equitable tolling provisions set forth in 29 C.F.R. §1614.604(c). Absent mutual agreement, agencies and complainants will be required to document in the record the reason(s) why tolling any of the time limits set forth in 29 CFR Part 1614 is necessary. Such justification will fully be considered by the Commission in any appeal raised in the matter.
4. Agencies and complainants are encouraged to seek mutual agreement with respect to the extension of any timeframes. Where such agreements are reached, they should be reduced to writing and made part of the record. OFO will honor such agreements on appeal, unless they are clearly onerous to one party or otherwise violate the standards for equitable tolling, waiver or estoppel.
5. EEOC Administrative Judges will continue to manage the hearings program. Administrative Judges will continue to hold conferences, manage discovery, refer cases to ADR and settlement, issue summary judgment decisions and, where appropriate, hold hearings and issue decisions. In light of the National Emergency, either party can seek an extension or other relief from any deadline for good cause shown.
6. The EEOC is deeply concerned about protecting (and committed to ensuring every federal employee continues to have) all their rights during this time of National Emergency. To that end, EEOC asks agency EEO offices to continue counseling employees, accepting their discrimination complaints, and investigating these complaints to the fullest extent possible without undermining mission-critical functions. We ask agencies not to issue final actions on any EEO complaint, unless the investigation is complete and the Complainant has requested that the final action be issued.
7. EEOC will continue to prepare appellate decisions but will not mail those decisions. A Complainant who provides an e-mail address and waives first class mailing may request the decision via e-mail to ofe.eoc@eoc.gov. The Commission is extremely cognizant of preserving a party's right to file a civil action in U.S. District Court. Given the current National Emergency, the Commission is suspending issuance of all appellate decisions via the U. S. mail until further notice in order to best preserve those rights.

8. Until further notice, OFO does not have access to U.S. Mail; rather, we ask that all submissions and communications from both agencies and complainants be digital, via the Public Portal/FEDSEP. We ask those who submitted items via U.S. Mail on or after March 6, 2020 to resubmit them via the Public Portal/FEDSEP.
9. The Commission supports and encourages the use of digital documents and electronic signatures. A digital document used by a person, agency, or other entity shall have the same force and effect as those documents not produced by electronic means. “Electronic signature” means any digital symbol, sound, or process attached to or logically associated with a digital record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record.
10. Each agency subject to the regulations at 29 CFR Part 1614 is directed to forward a copy of this notice, using the most effective available method, to each Complainant with a pending EEO matter and to each person who hereafter contacts an agency EEO counselor or otherwise enters into the agency’s EEO process.
11. For more Commission information and resources, please go to our COVID-19 information links at: <https://www.eeoc.gov/coronavirus/>