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**THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**BEFORE**  
**THE OFFICE OF EMPLOYEE APPEALS**

_____	)	
In the Matter of:	)	
	)	
SHARON SUMLER,	)	
Employee	)	OEA Matter No.: 2401-0233-11
	)	
v.	)	Date of Issuance: September 20, 2013
	)	
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS,	)	
Agency	)	MONICA DOHNJI, Esq.
_____	)	Administrative Judge
Sharon Sumler, Employee <i>Pro Se</i>		
Lindsay Nienast, Esq., Agency Representative		

**INITIAL DECISION**

**INTRODUCTION AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND**

On September 28, 2011, Sharon Sumler (“Employee”) filed a Petition for Appeal with the Office of Employee Appeals (“OEA” or “Office”) contesting the District of Columbia Department of Public Works’ (“Agency” or “DPW”) action of abolishing her position through a Reduction-In-Force (“RIF”). The effective date of the RIF was September 30, 2011. At the time her position was abolished, Employee’s official position of record was a Solid Waste Inspector. On November 2, 2011, Agency filed its Answer to Employee’s Petition for Appeal.

I was assigned this matter on June 26, 2013. On July 9, 2013, I issued an Order requiring the parties to submit briefs addressing the issue of whether the RIF was properly conducted in this matter. On July 26, 2013, Agency submitted its Motion to Dismiss. On August 20, 2013, Employee’s copy of the July 26, 2013, Order was returned to this Office marked: “Return to Sender...Unable to Forward.” Subsequently, on August 26, 2013, I issued an Order for Statement of Good Cause, wherein Employee was ordered to submit a statement of good cause based on her failure to submit a response to the July 9, 2013, Order on or before September 9, 2013. On September 17, 2013, the August 26, 2013, Order was also returned to this Office marked: “Return to Sender...Unable to Forward.” As of the date of this decision, Employee has not responded to either Order. The record is now closed.

## JURISDICTION

The Office has jurisdiction in this matter pursuant to D.C. Official Code § 1-606.03 (2001).

## ISSUE

Whether Agency's action of separating Employee from service pursuant to a RIF was done in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, or regulations.

## FINDING OF FACTS, ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The following findings of facts, analysis, and conclusions of law are based on the documentary evidence presented by the parties during the course of Employee's appeal process with OEA. D.C. Official Code § 1-606.03 (2001) gives this Office the authority to review, *inter alia*, appeals from separations pursuant to a RIF. I find that in a RIF, I am guided primarily by D.C. Official Code § 1-624.08, which states in pertinent part that:

(a) ***Notwithstanding any other provision of law, regulation, or collective bargaining agreement either in effect or to be negotiated while this legislation is in effect*** for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2000, and *each subsequent fiscal year*, each agency head is authorized, within the agency head's discretion, to identify positions for abolishment (emphasis added).

(b) Prior to February 1 of each fiscal year, each personnel authority (other than a personnel authority of an agency which is subject to a management reform plan under subtitle B of title XI of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997) shall make a final determination that a position within the personnel authority is to be abolished.

(c) ***Notwithstanding any rights or procedures established by any other provision of this subchapter***, any District government employee, regardless of date of hire, who encumbers a position identified for abolishment shall be separated without competition or assignment rights, except as provided in this section (emphasis added).

(d) An employee affected by the abolishment of a position pursuant to this section who, but for this section would be entitled to compete for retention, shall be entitled to one round of lateral competition pursuant to Chapter 24 of the District of Columbia Personnel Manual, which shall be limited to positions in the employee's competitive level.

(e) Each employee selected for separation pursuant to this section shall be given written notice of at least 30 days before the effective date of his or her separation.

(f) Neither the establishment of a competitive area smaller than an agency, nor the determination that a specific position is to be abolished, nor separation pursuant to this section shall be subject to review except that:

(1) An employee may file a complaint contesting a determination or a separation pursuant to subchapter XV of this chapter or § 2-1403.03; and

(2) An employee may file with the Office of Employee Appeals an appeal contesting that the separation procedures of subsections (d) and (e) were not properly applied.

In *Mezile v. D.C. Department on Disability Services*, the D.C. Superior Court found that “the language of § 1-624.08 is unclear as to whether it replaced § 1-624.02 entirely, or if the government can only use it during times of fiscal emergency.”<sup>1</sup> The Court also found that both laws were current and that the government triggers the use of the applicable statute by using “specific language and procedures.”<sup>2</sup>

However, the Court of Appeals took a different position. In *Washington Teachers’ Union*, the District of Columbia Public Schools (“DCPS”) conducted a 2004 RIF “to ensure balanced budgets, rather than deficits in Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005.”<sup>3</sup> The Court of Appeals found that the 2004 RIF conducted for budgetary reasons, triggered the Abolishment Act (“the Act”) instead of “the regular RIF procedures found in D.C. Code § 1-624.02.”<sup>4</sup> The Court stated that the “ordinary and plain meaning of the words used in § 1-624.08(c) appears to leave no doubt about the inapplicability of § 1-624.02 to the 2004 RIF.”<sup>5</sup>

The Abolishment Act applies to *positions abolished for fiscal year 2000 and subsequent fiscal years* (emphasis added). The legislation pertaining to the Act was enacted specifically for the purpose of addressing budgetary issues resulting in a RIF.<sup>6</sup> The Act provides that, “notwithstanding any rights or procedures established by any other provision of this subchapter,” which indicates that it supersedes any other RIF regulations. The use of the term ‘notwithstanding’ carries special significance in statutes and is used to “override conflicting provisions of any other section.”<sup>7</sup> Further, “it is well established that the use of such a ‘notwithstanding clause’ clearly signals the drafter’s intention that the provisions of the ‘notwithstanding’ section override conflicting provisions of any other sections.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Mezile v. District of Columbia Department on Disability Services*, No. 2010 CA 004111 (D.C. Super. Ct. February 2, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 1132.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Washington Teachers’ Union, Local # 6 v. District of Columbia Public Schools*, 960 A.2d 1123, 1125 (D.C. 2008).

<sup>7</sup> *Burton v. Office of Employee Appeals*, 30 A.3d 789 (D.C. 2011).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

The Abolishment Act was enacted after § 1-624.02, and thus, is a more streamlined statute for use during times of fiscal emergency.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the persuasive language of § 1-624.08, including the term ‘notwithstanding’, suggests that this is the more applicable statutory provision to conduct RIFs resulting from budgetary constraints. Accordingly, I am primarily guided by § 1-624.08 for RIFs authorized due to budgetary restrictions. Under this section, an employee whose position was terminated may only contest before this Office:

1. That she did not receive written notice thirty (30) days prior to the effective date of her separation from service; and/or
2. That she was not afforded one round of lateral competition within her competitive level.

### ***Employee’s Position***

In her Petition for Appeal, Employee submits that 1) although the RIF notice was mailed on August 31, 2011, she received the notice on September 1, 2011, and therefore, she was not fairly given thirty (30) days written notice; 2) the RIF notice had the wrong address for OEA; and 3) because she was an outstanding employee, she was promised that she would keep her job.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Agency’s Position***

Agency submits that it conducted the RIF in accordance with D.C. Official Code by affording Employee one round of lateral competition and thirty (30) days written notice prior to the effective date of the RIF. Agency notes that 1) Employee was given sufficient notice, and any errors in the notice were harmless; 2) Agency’s reference to OEA’s former address in the RIF notice was harmless error; and 3) Employee suffered no loss in pay as a result of the RIF.<sup>11</sup> Agency further submits that this matter should be dismissed as moot because Employee was reinstated to her same position of record and she is not entitled to backpay. Agency explains that since Employee has been granted the entire relief sought, this matter is now moot.<sup>12</sup>

In this matter, Agency has submitted documentary evidence in support of its assertion that Employee was reinstated on October 1, 2011, a day after the September 30, 2011 RIF effective date.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, apart from the Petition for Appeal, Employee has since failed to submit any documentary evidence to prove that he still has a legally cognizable interest in the outcome of this matter. Accordingly, I conclude that this matter is moot because there is no other available remedy that Employee has not already received.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Mezile v. D.C. Department on Disability Services*, No. 2010 CA 004111 (D.C. Super. Ct. February 2, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Petition for Appeal (September 28, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Agency Answer (November 2, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Agency Motion to Dismiss (July 26, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at Attachment 2.

<sup>14</sup> See *Settlemyre v. Office of Employee Appeals*, 898 A.902 (D.C. 2006). In *Settlemyre*, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals held that a case is moot when the issues presented are no longer “live” or the parties lack “a legally cognizable interest in the outcome.” Moreover, this Court found that it is well settled that an appeal is moot when

Additionally, OEA Rule 621.1 grants an Administrative Judge (“AJ”) the authority to impose sanctions upon the parties as necessary to serve the ends of justice. The AJ “in the exercise of sound discretion may dismiss the action or rule for the appellant” if a party fails to take reasonable steps to prosecute or defend an appeal.<sup>15</sup> Failure of a party to prosecute or defend an appeal includes, but is not limited to, a failure to:

- (a) Appear at a scheduled proceeding after receiving notice;
- (b) Submit required documents after being provided with a deadline for such submission; or
- (c) Inform this Office of a change of address which results in correspondence being returned.

This Office has consistently held that failure to prosecute an appeal includes a failure to submit required documents after being provided with a deadline for such submission.<sup>16</sup> Here, Employee was warned in the July 9, 2013, and August 26, 2013, Orders that failure to comply could result in sanctions, including dismissal. Employee did not provide a written response to either Order. Both were required for a proper resolution of this matter on its merits. I find that Employee’s failure to prosecute her appeal is a violation of OEA Rule 621. Accordingly, I further find that Employee has not exercised the diligence expected of an appellant pursuing an appeal before this Office and this represents another reason why this appeal should be dismissed.

### ORDER

It is hereby **ORDERED** that the Petition for Appeal in this matter is **DISMISSED**.

FOR THE OFFICE:

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MONICA DOHNJI, Esq.  
Administrative Judge

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while the appeal is pending, an event occurs that renders relief impossible or unnecessary (citing *Vaughn v. United States*, 579 A.2d 170, 175 n.7 (D.C. 1990)).

<sup>15</sup> OEA Rule 621.3.

<sup>16</sup> *Employee v. Agency*, OEA Matter No. 1602-0078-83, 32 D.C. Reg. 1244 (1985); *Williams v. D.C. Public Schools*, OEA Matter No. 2401-0244-09 (December 13, 2010); *Brady v. Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization*, OEA Matter No. 2401-0219-09 (November 1, 2010).