

performance of duty. She stopped work on May 4, 2022.³ OWCP accepted the claim for open bite of right hand, and puncture wound without foreign body of right hand. It paid appellant wage-loss compensation on the supplemental rolls commencing June 19, 2022, and on the periodic rolls commencing January 29, 2023.

On April 17, 2023 OWCP referred appellant, along with a March 21, 2023 statement of accepted facts (SOAF), the medical record, and a series of questions to Dr. Christine M. Cisneros, Board-certified in occupational medicine, for a second opinion evaluation regarding the nature and extent of appellant's employment-related residuals and disability. The SOAF noted that appellant had filed a prior traumatic injury claim under OWCP File No. xxxxxx378 for an October 26, 2003 employment injury accepted for contusion of left forearm, open contusion of both hands, open wound of bilateral hand except finger alone without complications, and open wound of bilateral forearm without complications, sustained when a law enforcement canine bit her on the left arm during training.⁴ On May 8, 2023, OWCP updated the SOAF to indicate that appellant had preexisting, nonoccupational osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia.

In a May 17, 2023 report, Dr. Cisneros reviewed the SOAF and medical record. She noted that appellant had sustained prior dog bite wounds to her bilateral upper extremities in 2003 and had returned to full-duty work on November 4, 2003. Dr. Cisneros provided examination findings of well-healed puncture wounds in the volar aspect at the base of the right thumb, at the volar aspect at the base of the right second digit, and a one centimeter wound between the third and fourth metacarpals that, according to appellant, "went through the hand." She also observed a well-healed bite wound on the dorsal side of the right hand over the lateral and second compartments, that both of appellant's hands were cold to the touch, with the right hand colder than the left, and decreased right thenar mass and right grip strength indicative of disuse of the right hand. Dr. Cisneros diagnosed open bite of right hand, puncture wound without foreign body of right hand, and chronic pain, right hand. She returned appellant to sedentary duty with limited use of the right hand.

On February 9, 2024, OWCP referred appellant, along with a SOAF, the medical record, and a series of questions to Dr. Robert C. Travis, a Board-certified orthopedic surgeon, for a second opinion regarding the nature and extent of her accepted employment injury, and her work capacity.⁵

In a March 12, 2024 report, Dr. Travis reviewed the SOAF and medical record. On examination of the right hand, he found four healed dog bite lacerations on the plantar and dorsal surface. He reviewed a February 21, 2024 electromyography and nerve conduction velocity (EMG/NCV) study which revealed mild right carpal tunnel syndrome and right ulnar neuropathy "unrelated to the dog bites[.]" and a February 27, 2024 MRI scan of the right wrist which demonstrated an impression of an "old ununited fracture involving a hypoplastic hook of the hamate bone[.]" Dr. Travis provided an impression of "[s]ubjective pain and dysesthesia of the

³ OWCP assigned the present claim OWCP File No. xxxxxx863. Under OWCP File No. xxxxxx378, OWCP accepted appellant's traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) for an October 26, 2003 dog bite with contusion of left forearm, open contusion of both hands, open wound of both hands except finger alone without complications, and open wound of both forearms without complications. Appellant stopped work on October 26, 2003, and returned to full duty on November 4, 2003. Appellant's claim under OWCP File No. xxxxxx378 has not been administratively combined by OWCP with the present claim.

⁴ See *supra* note 3.

⁵ OWCP also authorized an MRI scan and electrodiagnostic testing of the right upper extremity.

right hand with mild carpal tunnel syndrome.” He opined that the accepted employment injury had resolved and returned appellant to full duty with no restrictions.

In an April 4, 2024 notice, OWCP proposed to terminate appellant’s wage-loss compensation and medical benefits because she no longer had disability or residuals causally related to her accepted May 3, 2022 employment injury. It found that the weight of the medical evidence rested with the March 12, 2024 report of Dr. Travis, the second opinion physician, who opined that she no longer had disability or residuals causally related to her accepted May 3, 2022 employment injury.

In an April 26, 2024 statement, appellant, through counsel, objected to the proposed termination. Counsel contended that there was a conflict of medical opinion requiring resolution by an impartial medical examiner (IME).

OWCP subsequently received an April 17, 2024 report by Dr. Shuyato wherein he diagnosed CRPS, Type 1 of the right upper extremity, work-related injury, dog bite of right hand, other disturbances of skin sensation, right carpal tunnel syndrome, ulnar nerve entrapment at the right wrist, fracture of right hamate bone with routine healing, and right elbow, wrist, and hand pain. Dr. Shuyato concluded that appellant “may not be able to perform meaningful tasks required of her to do her job as a police officer.”

By decision dated June 17, 2024, OWCP finalized the notice of proposed termination of appellant’s wage-loss compensation and medical benefits, effective that date, based on Dr. Travis’ March 12, 2024 second opinion report.

On June 26, 2024 appellant, through counsel, requested an oral hearing before a representative of OWCP’s Branch of Hearings and Review.

OWCP subsequently received additional medical evidence.

By decision dated March 19, 2025, OWCP’s hearing representative affirmed the June 17, 2024 decision.

The Board, having duly considered this matter, finds that OWCP failed to meet its burden of proof to terminate appellant’s wage-loss compensation and medical benefits, effective June 17, 2024.

OWCP’s procedures provide that cases should be administratively combined when correct adjudication of the issues depends on frequent cross-referencing between files.⁶ For example, if a new injury case is reported for an employee who previously filed an injury claim for a similar condition or the same region of the body, doubling is required.⁷ Herein, appellant’s claim under OWCP File No. xxxxxx378 involved prior accepted October 26, 2003 dog bite injuries to her right hand and forearm. OWCP relied on the opinion of Dr. Travis in justifying its termination decision.

⁶ Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *File Maintenance and Management*, Chapter 2.400.8c (February 2000).

⁷ *Id.*; *Order Reversing Case, E.B.*, Docket No. 25-0351 (issued April 15, 2025); *Order Remanding Case, C.G.*, Docket No. 23-0777 (issued October 5, 2023); *Order Remanding Case, M.L.*, Docket No. 20-1176 (issued April 29, 2021); *Order Remanding Case, L.M.*, Docket No. 19-1490 (issued January 29, 2020); *Order Remanding Case, L.H.*, Docket No. 18-1777 (issued July 2, 2019).

However, it had not administratively combined OWCP File No. xxxxxx378 with the present claim under OWCP File No. xxxxxx863. Once OWCP accepts a claim and pays compensation, it has the burden of proof to justify termination or modification of benefits.⁸ As OWCP had not administratively combined the claim files prior to its referral to Dr. Travis and the subsequent termination decision, the Board finds that it failed to meet its burden of proof to terminate appellant's wage-loss compensation.⁹ Accordingly,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the March 19, 2025 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is reversed.

Issued: April 29, 2026
Washington, DC

Alec J. Koromilas, Chief Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Patricia H. Fitzgerald, Deputy Chief Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Valerie D. Evans-Harrell, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

⁸ See *Order Reversing Case, D.S.*, Docket No. 25-0878 (issued December 12, 2025); *Order Reversing Case, E.B., id.; D.G.*, Docket No. 19-1259 (issued January 29, 2020); *S.F.*, 59 ECAB 642 (2008); *Kelly Y. Simpson*, 57 ECAB 197 (2005); *Paul L. Stewart*, 54 ECAB 824 (2003).

⁹ See *Order Reversing Case, D.S., id.; Order Reversing Case, E.B., id.; Order Reversing Case, C.V.*, Docket No. 23-0913 (issued December 4, 2023).