

hostile treatment while in the performance of duty. She explained that she was asked by her supervisor, Postmaster M.D., without explanation, to leave the workplace before the police were called. On the reverse side of the claim form, M.D. asserted that appellant willfully failed to follow instructions by reporting to work at an unscheduled time. Appellant had been instructed on February 27, 2025 to report to work at 6:30 a.m. on February 28, 2025, but instead reported at 2:00 a.m. M.D. then directed appellant to leave the building and warned her that if she failed to follow instructions, she would call the police. Appellant then left the employing establishment. She stopped work on February 28, 2025, and returned on March 1, 2025.

In a development letter dated March 4, 2025, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of her claim. It advised her of the type of additional factual and medical evidence needed and provided a questionnaire for her completion. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to submit the necessary evidence.

In reports dated March 1 and 28, 2025, Carla Turrentine, a licensed clinical social worker, provided a history of injury and diagnosis.

In an April 9, 2025 follow-up letter, OWCP advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review and found that the evidence remained insufficient to establish her claim. It noted that she had 60 days from the March 4, 2025 letter to submit the necessary evidence. OWCP further advised that if the evidence was not received during this time, it would issue a decision based on the evidence contained in the record.

In a development letter dated April 24, 2025, OWCP requested that the employing establishment provide additional information regarding appellant's claim, including comments from a knowledgeable supervisor. It afforded the employing establishment 30 days to respond. No response was received.

OWCP subsequently received March 12, 2025 patient discharge instructions from Dr. Mackenzie L. Bredbenner, a family practitioner, diagnosing anxiety and panic attack.

In a May 1, 2025 follow-up development letter, OWCP again requested additional information from the employing establishment.

OWCP subsequently received an April 29, 2025 statement, wherein M.D. related that appellant used sick leave dependent care for the period February 20 through 27, 2025. M.D. contacted appellant *via* text message on February 27, 2025 and directed her to report to work at 6:30 a.m. on February 28, 2025 as she would be completing a different rural route every day until she had completed all routes. Appellant related that she was unable to complete the rural routes due to motion sickness, that she was commuting from New York, and that she could not make last minute changes to her work schedule. M.D. asserted that there was no documented restriction for completing the rural routes and again instructed appellant to report to work at 6:30 a.m. Appellant responded and offered to complete the route in her own vehicle on her scheduled day off. M.D. reported to work at 2:00 a.m. on February 28, 2025 and found appellant sitting at her desk. She asserted that she quietly instructed appellant to leave the employing establishment and return at 6:30 a.m., her scheduled shift. M.D. waited approximately 10 minutes before repeating her instruction, adding that if appellant did not leave, she would call the police as she

had with another employee. She denied raising her voice and asserted that her instructions were not overheard by other employees. Appellant then left the employing establishment, but did not return as directed. M.D. related that she held no animosity toward appellant, but that she should have been disciplined on numerous occasions for attendance and failure to follow instructions. She reported that appellant willfully disobeyed an instruction. Appellant did not pass out, tremble, shake, or otherwise demonstrate distress and she left the premises of her own volition.

In a May 29, 2025 follow-up development letter, OWCP advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review and found that the evidence remained insufficient to establish her claim. It provided a questionnaire for her completion and afforded her 60 days to submit the necessary evidence. No response was received.

In a separate letter also dated May 29, 2025, OWCP requested that the employing establishment provide additional information regarding appellant's claim, including comments from a knowledgeable supervisor. On June 2, 2025 the employing establishment resubmitted M.D.'s April 29, 2025 statement.

By decision dated June 3, 2025, OWCP denied appellant's claim, finding that the evidence of record was insufficient to establish a compensable employment factor. Thus, the requirements had not been met to establish an injury as defined by FECA.

Appellant requested reconsideration on July 31, 2025. In support of her request, she submitted a July 18, 2025 report from Ms. Turrentine, who concluded that appellant's symptoms of anxiety were aggravated "by a toxic work environment, particularly during interactions with her supervisor."

OWCP also received a July 21, 2025 report wherein Dr. Aditya Brahmhatt, a family medicine physician, noted that appellant experienced panic attacks, intrusive thoughts, sleep disturbances, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating. Dr. Brahmhatt opined that these symptoms "have been exacerbated by reported stressors in the workplace." He concluded that appellant was disabled from working "due to the severity of her condition and required continued mental health treatment."

By decision dated September 26, 2025, OWCP denied modification.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

An employee seeking benefits under FECA² has the burden of proof to establish the essential elements of his or her claim, including the fact that the individual is an employee of the United States within the meaning of FECA, that the claim was filed within the applicable time limitation, that an injury was sustained while in the performance of duty as alleged, and that any disability or specific condition for which compensation is claimed is causally related to the

² *Id.*

employment injury.³ These are the essential elements of each and every compensation claim regardless of whether the claim is predicated on a traumatic injury or an occupational disease.⁴

To establish an emotional condition in the performance of duty, a claimant must submit: (1) factual evidence identifying an employment factor or incident alleged to have caused or contributed to his or her claimed emotional condition; (2) medical evidence establishing that he or she has a diagnosed emotional or psychiatric disorder; and (3) rationalized medical opinion evidence establishing that the accepted compensable employment factors are causally related to the diagnosed emotional condition.⁵

Workers' compensation law does not apply to each and every injury or illness that is somehow related to an employee's employment.⁶ There are situations where an injury or an illness has some connection with the employment but nevertheless does not come within the concept or coverage of workers' compensation. Where the disability results from an employee's emotional reaction to his or her regular or specially assigned duties or to a requirement imposed by the employment, the disability comes within the coverage of FECA.⁷ On the other hand, the disability is not covered when it results from such factors as an employee's fear of a reduction-in-force or his or her frustration from not being permitted to work in a particular environment, or to hold a particular position.⁸

Administrative and personnel matters, although generally related to the employee's employment, are administrative functions of the employer rather than the regular or specially assigned work duties of the employee and are not covered under FECA.⁹ However, the Board has held that where the evidence establishes error or abuse on the part of the employing establishment in what would otherwise be an administrative matter, coverage will be afforded.¹⁰ In determining whether the employing establishment has erred or acted abusively, the Board will

³ *S.Z.*, Docket No. 20-0106 (issued July 9, 2020); *A.J.*, Docket No. 18-1116 (issued January 23, 2019); *Gary J. Watling*, 52 ECAB 278 (2001).

⁴ 20 C.F.R. § 10.115(e); *M.K.*, Docket No. 18-1623 (issued April 10, 2019); *see T.O.*, Docket No. 18-1012 (issued October 29, 2018); *Michael E. Smith*, 50 ECAB 313 (1999).

⁵ *See C.C.*, Docket No. 21-0283 (issued July 11, 2022); *S.K.*, Docket No. 18-1648 (issued March 14, 2019); *Donna Faye Cardwell*, 41 ECAB 730 (1990).

⁶ *T.G.*, Docket No. 19-0071 (issued May 28, 2019); *L.D.*, 58 ECAB 344 (2007); *Robert Breeden*, 57 ECAB 622 (2006).

⁷ *Lillian Cutler*, 28 ECAB 125 (1976); *L.H.*, Docket No. 18-1217 (issued May 3, 2019); *Trudy A. Scott*, 52 ECAB 309 (2001).

⁸ *A.E.*, Docket No. 18-1587 (issued March 13, 2019); *Gregorio E. Conde*, 52 ECAB 410 (2001).

⁹ *See B.K.*, Docket No. 23-0902 (issued November 29, 2023). *S.K.*, Docket No. 18-1648 (issued March 14, 2019); *D.T.*, Docket No. 19-1270 (issued February 4, 2020); *Thomas D. McEuen*, 41 ECAB 387 (1990), *reaff'd on recon.*, 42 ECAB 556 (1991).

¹⁰ *O.G.*, Docket No. 18-0359 (issued August 7, 2019); *D.R.*, Docket No. 16-0605 (issued October 17, 2016); *William H. Fortner*, 49 ECAB 324 (1998).

examine the factual evidence of record to determine whether the employing establishment acted reasonably.¹¹

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof to establish an emotional/stress-related condition in the performance of duty on February 28, 2025, as alleged.

OWCP denied appellant's emotional condition claim on the grounds that she had not established a compensable employment factor. The Board must, thus, initially review whether the alleged incident and conditions of employment are covered employment factors under the terms of FECA.¹²

Appellant has not attributed her emotional/stress-related conditions to the performance of her regularly or specially assigned duties under *Cutler*.¹³ Rather, she has alleged that her conditions were the result of administrative actions taken by her manager/supervisor. Specifically, appellant alleged that on February 28, 2025 Postmaster M.D. informed her that she needed to leave the workplace before the police were called which resulted in severe anxiety and emotional distress causing shortness of breath and rapid heartbeat due to workplace intimidation and hostile treatment. M.D. explained that appellant did not report to work at the time instructed and that she did not leave the building when directed to do so. The Board has previously found that work assignments,¹⁴ removal from the building,¹⁵ and management directives,¹⁶ are administrative functions of the employer, and not duties of the employee.¹⁷ As noted above, the Board has held that administrative and personnel matters, although generally related to the employee's employment, are administrative functions of the employer rather than the regular or specially assigned work duties of the employee, and are not covered under FECA.¹⁸ In determining whether the employing establishment has erred or acted abusively, the Board will examine the factual evidence of record to determine whether the employing establishment acted

¹¹ *B.S.*, Docket No. 19-0378 (issued July 10, 2019); *Ruth S. Johnson*, 46 ECAB 237 (1994).

¹² *S.K.*, *supra* note 9; *Dennis J. Balogh*, 52 ECAB 232 (2001).

¹³ *Supra* note 7; *see also S.K.*, *supra* note 9; *D.T.*, *supra* note 9, *Thomas D. McEuen*, *supra* note 9; *Trudy A. Scott*, 52 ECAB 309 (2001).

¹⁴ *T.L.*, Docket No. 25-0499 (issued August 25, 2025); *D.M.*, Docket No. 20-0500 (issued July 6, 2021); *V.M.*, Docket No. 15-1080 (issued May 11, 2017).

¹⁵ *T.L.*, *id.*; *S.S.*, Docket No. 08-729 (issued September 25, 2008).

¹⁶ *T.L.*, *id.*; *S.B.*, Docket No. 18-1113 (issued February 21, 2019).

¹⁷ *See M.C.*, Docket No. 18-0585 (issued February 13, 2019); *see Janet I. Jones*, 47 ECAB 345, 347 (1996), *Jimmy Gilbreath*, 44 ECAB 555, 558 (1993); *Apple Gate*, 41 ECAB 581, 588 (1990); *Joseph C. DeDonato*, 39 ECAB 1260, 1266-67 (1988).

¹⁸ *T.L.*, Docket No. 18-0100 (issued June 20, 2019); *Matilda R. Wyatt*, 52 ECAB 421 (2001); *Thomas D. McEuen*, *supra* note 9.

reasonably.¹⁹ Appellant has not submitted any evidence to support that M.D. erred or acted unreasonably by instructing her to report to work at 6:30 a.m. on February 28, 2025 or instructing her to leave the employing establishment and return at the 6:30 a.m. reporting time as previously directed, with the warning that if she did not leave, she would call the police. Because appellant has not established error or abuse by the employing establishment in this administrative matter, the Board finds that she has not established a compensable employment factor.²⁰

As the Board finds that appellant has not established a compensable employment factor, it is not necessary to consider the medical evidence of record.²¹

Appellant may submit new evidence or argument with a written request for reconsideration to OWCP within one year of this merit decision, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 8128(a) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 10.605 through 10.607.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof to establish an emotional/stress-related condition in the performance of duty on February 28, 2025, as alleged.

¹⁹ *P.G.*, Docket No. 25-0555 (issued June 20, 2025); *J.W.*, Docket No. 17-0999 (issued September 4, 2018); *Ruth S. Johnson*, 46 ECAB 237 (1994).

²⁰ *C.M.*, Docket No. 25-0092 (issued February 5, 2025); *M.B.*, Docket No. 20-1407 (issued May 25, 2022).

²¹ *See R.B.*, Docket No. 19-0434 (issued November 22, 2019); *B.O.*, Docket No. 17-1986 (issued January 18, 2019) (it is not necessary to consider the medical evidence of record if a claimant has not established any compensable employment factors). *See also Margaret S. Krzycki*, 43 ECAB 496, 502-03 (1992).

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the June 3 and September 26, 2025 decisions of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs are affirmed.

Issued: February 19, 2026
Washington, DC

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

Janice B. Askin, Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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