United States Department of Labor
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

T.T., Appellant	)	
and	)	**Docket No. 26-0647**
	)	**Issued: October 22, 2026**
U.S. POSTAL SERVICE, JACKSONVILLE POST OFFICE, Jacksonville, FL, Employer	)	

Appearances:
Appellant, pro se
Office of Solicitor, for the Director

Case Submitted on the Record

DECISION AND ORDER

Before:
ALEC J. KOROMILAS, Chief Judge
PATRICIA H. FITZGERALD, Deputy Chief Judge
JANICE B. ASKIN, Judge

JURISDICTION

On July 7, 2026 appellant filed a timely appeal from a July 2, 2026 merit decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP). Pursuant to the Federal Employees' Compensation Act[1] (FECA) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 501.2(c) and 501.3, the Board has jurisdiction over the merits of this case.

ISSUE

The issue is whether appellant has met her burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted March 2, 2026 employment incident.

FACTUAL HISTORY

On April 13, 2026 appellant, then a 42-year-old city carrier, filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on March 2, 2026 she sustained injuries when she twisted her ankle and

[1] 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq*.

fell on her knee while descending stairs in the performance of duty. She stopped work on the date of injury.

On March 4, and 24, 2026 appellant sought medical treatment from Melissa Kotziers, a physician assistant. Ms. Kotziers related that appellant twisted her left ankle and scraped her right knee while descending the stairs from a porch. She diagnosed sprain and strain of the left ankle, and right knee contusion. In a March 13, 2026 note, Jason Misel, a physician assistant, repeated these diagnoses.

In an April 23, 2026 development letter, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of her claim. It advised her of the type of factual and medical evidence needed to establish her claim and provided a questionnaire for her completion. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to submit the necessary evidence.

OWCP subsequently received notes from Ms. Kotziers and Mr. Misel dated March 4 and 13, 2026, wherein they repeated their findings and diagnoses.

In a follow-up letter dated June 5, 2026, OWCP advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review, and the evidence remained insufficient to establish her claim. It noted that she had 60 days from the April 23, 2026 letter to submit the necessary evidence. OWCP further advised that if the necessary evidence was not received during this time, it would issue a decision based on the evidence contained in the record.

OWCP subsequently received March 4, 13, and 24, 2026 form reports from Dr. James Perin, a Board-certified family practitioner, diagnosing work-related sprain and strain of the left ankle, and right knee contusion.

In March 4 and 13, and June 6, 2026 notes, Dr. Perin diagnosed sprain and strain of the left ankle occurring on March 2, 2026. He related that trauma occurred due to appellant's fall, that the injury was work related, and that appellant was stepping down from a porch step when she twisted her left ankle and landed on her right knee.

By decision dated July 2, 2026, OWCP accepted that the March 2, 2026 employment incident occurred, as alleged. However, it denied appellant's claim, finding that the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted March 2, 2026 employment incident.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

An employee seeking benefits under FECA[2] 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 timely filed, that an injury was sustained in the performance of duty, as alleged, and that any disability or medical condition for

[2] *Id.*

which compensation is claimed is causally related to the employment injury.[3] These are the essential elements of every compensation claim regardless of whether the claim is predicated on a traumatic injury or an occupational disease.[4]

To determine whether a federal employee has sustained a traumatic injury in the performance of duty, it first must be determined whether fact of injury has been established. There are two components involved in establishing fact of injury. First, the employee must submit sufficient evidence to establish that he or she actually experienced the employment incident at the time and place, and in the manner alleged. Second, the employee must submit sufficient evidence to establish that the employment incident caused an injury.[5]

Causal relationship is a medical question that requires rationalized medical opinion evidence to resolve the issue. The opinion of the physician must be based on a complete factual and medical background, must be one of reasonable medical certainty, and must be supported by medical rationale explaining the nature of the relationship between the diagnosed condition and the specific employment incident.[6] Neither the mere fact that a disease or condition manifests itself during a period of employment, nor the belief that the disease or condition was caused or aggravated by employment factors or incidents is sufficient to establish causal relationship.[7]

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof to establish a left ankle sprain/strain causally related to the accepted March 2, 2026 employment incident.

In support of her claim, appellant submitted a series of notes and form reports dated March 4 through June 6, 2026, wherein Dr. Perin diagnosed left ankle sprain/strain and contusion of right knee. He noted appellant's history of injury and opined that the right knee and left ankle conditions were caused or aggravated by the accepted March 2, 2026 employment incident. However, Dr. Perin's opinion was conclusory in nature as it lacked rationale. The Board has held

[3] *C.G.*, Docket No. 20-0058 (issued September 30, 2021); *S.B.*, Docket No. 17-1779 (issued February 7, 2018); *J.P.*, 59 ECAB 178 (2007); *Joe D. Cameron*, 41 ECAB 153 (1989).

[4] *J.M.*, Docket No. 17-0284 (issued February 7, 2018); *R.C.*, 59 ECAB 427 (2008); *James E. Chadden, Sr.*, 40 ECAB 312 (1988).

[5] *T.H.*, Docket No. 19-0599 (issued January 28, 2020); *K.L.*, Docket No. 18-1029 (issued January 9, 2019); *John J. Carlone*, 41 ECAB 354 (1989).

[6] *K.B.,* Docket No. 26-0467 (issued July 22, 2026); *V.C.*, Docket No. 26-0380 (issued June 29, 2026); *S.S.*, Docket No. 18-1488 (issued March 11, 2019).

[7] *K.B., and V.C.*, *id.*; *J.L.*, Docket No. 18-1804 (issued April 12, 2019).

that a medical report is of limited probative value if it contains a conclusion which is unsupported by sufficient medical rationale.[8] Therefore, this evidence is insufficient to establish the claim.

OWCP also received medical evidence from physician assistants. However, certain healthcare providers such as nurses, physician assistants, and physical therapists are not considered physicians as defined under FECA and their reports do not constitute competent medical evidence.[9] Consequently, these medical findings or opinions are insufficient to establish the claim.[10]

As the medical evidence of record is insufficient to establish a left knee sprain/strain causally related to the accepted March 2, 2026 employment incident, the Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof.

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 and 20 C.F.R. §§ 10.605 through 10.607.

The Board further finds, however, that the case is not in posture for decision with regard to whether appellant's right knee contusion constitutes a visible injury in accordance with OWCP procedures.

OWCP, in its July 2, 2026 decision, denied appellant's right knee contusion without applying its procedures regarding the acceptance of visible injuries.[11] The case shall therefore be remanded for consideration of the medical evidence with regard to whether appellant's right knee contusion constitutes a visible injury. Following any further development as deemed necessary, OWCP shall issue a *de novo* decision.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof to establish a left ankle sprain/strain causally related to the accepted March 2, 2026 employment incident. The Board

[8] *J.F.,* Docket No. 26-0068 (issued February 24, 2026); *N.R.,* Docket No. 25-0861 (issued December 23, 2025); *C.G.,* Docket No. 23-0013 (issued April 24, 2023); *C.B.,* Docket No. 20-0629 (issued May 26, 2021); *A.G.,* Docket No. 20-0187 (issued December 31, 2020); *see J.W.,* Docket No. 19-1014 (issued October 24, 2019); *S.W.,* Docket No. 18-0005 (issued May 24, 2018).

[9] Section 8102(2) of FECA provides as follows: physician includes surgeons, podiatrists, dentists, clinical psychologists, optometrists, chiropractors, and osteopathic practitioners within the scope of their practice as defined by State law. 5 U.S.C. § 8102(2); 20 C.F.R. § 10.5(t). *See* Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *Causal Relationship*, Chapter 2.805.3a(1) (version 1.2, issued May 4, 2026); *David P. Sawchuk,* 57 ECAB 316, 320 n.11 (2006) (lay individuals such as physician assistants, nurses, and physical therapists are not competent to render a medical opinion under FECA); *see also S.S.,* Docket No. 21-1140 (issued June 29, 2022) (physician assistants are not considered physicians under FECA and are not competent to provide medical opinions).

[10] *T.H.,* Docket No. 23-1142 (issued March 28, 2024).

[11] Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *Initial Development of Claims*, Chapter 2.800.6 (version 1.2, issued May 4, 2026). *See also* Part 2 -- Claims, *Causal Relationship*, Chapter 2.805.3c (version 1.2, issued May 4, 2026); *D.J.*, Docket No. 25-0581 (issued September 17, 2025); *A.J.*, Docket No. 19-1289 (issued December 31, 2019).

further finds that the case is not in posture for decision with regard to whether appellant's right knee contusion constitutes a visible injury in accordance with OWCP procedures.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the July 2, 2026 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is affirmed in part and set aside in part. The case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this decision of the Board.

Issued: October 22, 2026
Washington, DC

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

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

Janice B. Askin, Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board