United States Department of Labor
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

L.B., Appellant	)	
and	)	**Docket No. 26-0776**
	)	**Issued: October 30, 2026**
U.S. POSTAL SERVICE, PROCESSING & DISTRIBUTION CENTER, Gainesville, FL, Employer	)	

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

Case Submitted on the Record

DECISION AND ORDER

Before:
PATRICIA H. FITZGERALD, Deputy Chief Judge
JANICE B. ASKIN, Judge
VALERIE D. EVANS-HARRELL, Alternate Judge

JURISDICTION

On August 18, 2026 appellant filed a timely appeal from a July 15, 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 diagnosed medical condition in connection with the accepted April 26, 2026 employment incident.

FACTUAL HISTORY

On April 26, 2026 appellant, then a 44-year-old manager of area mail processing and facility consolidation, filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on that day she

[1] 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq*.

sustained left ring finger swelling, numbness, tingling, and a subungual hematoma while in the performance of duty. She explained that while trying to lower a shelf, her left ring finger became caught between the shelf and a metal insert that held the shelf in place. Appellant stopped work on April 27, 2026, and returned to work on April 29, 2026.

Appellant submitted an April 26, 2026 note, signed by a nurse with an illegible signature, stating that she could return to work on April 28, 2026 with restrictions.

In a letter dated May 1, 2026, the employing establishment controverted the claim as appellant had not submitted rationalized medical evidence establishing an injury causally related to the claimed employment incident.

By development letter dated May 4, 2026, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of her claim. It advised her of the type of medical evidence needed to establish her claim and afforded her 60 days to submit the necessary evidence.

In an emergency department report dated April 26, 2026, Dr. Raymond Sutkowski, a Board-certified diagnostic radiologist, related that appellant was seen after accidently smashing her left 4th finger between a wall and a metal shelf. He related that x-ray examination of appellant's left 4th finger revealed no acute findings, however, examination of the skin of the left 4th finger showed purplish discoloration under the nail, and minimal swelling. In the same document, Dr. Habtu M. Adera, a physician Board-certified in family medicine, related that appellant underwent a high temperature cautery and the hematoma under the nail of her 4th finger was evacuated. Dr. Adera related an impression of left finger crushing injury.

By decision dated July 15, 2026, OWCP denied appellant's claim, finding that the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish a diagnosed medical condition in connection with the accepted April 26, 2026 employment incident. It concluded, therefore, that the requirements had not been met to establish an injury as defined by FECA.

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

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.

[2] *Id*.

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

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.[4]

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.[5] 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.[6]

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that this case is not in posture for decision.

OWCP found that the April 26, 2026 employment incident occurred at the time, place and in the manner alleged. In her Form CA-1, appellant related that she sustained left 4th finger swelling, numbness, tingling, and subungual hematoma while trying to lower a shelf when her left ring finger became caught between a shelf and the metal insert that held the shelf in place. In a report dated April 26, 2026, Dr. Sutkowski noted that appellant was seen after she smashed her left ring finger between a wall and metal plate. He performed a physical examination and observed purplish discoloration of the skin of the 4th left finger and minimal swelling. Appellant was thereafter seen that same day by Dr. Adera who cauterized a hematoma under appellant's 4th left finger. Dr. Adera also noted an impression of crushing injury. OWCP, in its July 15, 2026 decision, however, denied appellant's claim, without applying its procedures regarding the acceptance of visible injuries.[7] The case shall therefore be remanded for consideration of the medical evidence with regard to whether appellant's 4th left finger hematoma or crushing injury constitute a visible injury. Following this and other such further development as deemed necessary, OWCP shall issue a d*e novo* decision.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that this case is not in posture for decision.

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[4] *K.B.,* Docket No. 26-0467 (issued July 22, 2026); *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).

[5] *V.C.,* Docket No. 26-0380 (issued June 29, 2026); *S.S.,* Docket No. 18-1488 (issued March 11, 2019).

[6] *V.C., id.*; *M.V.,* Docket No. 07-0437 (issued April 25, 2007).

[7] Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *Initial Development of Claims*, Chapter 2.800.6 (version 1.2, issued May 4, 2026). *See also id*. at Part 2 -- Claims, *Causal Relationship*, Chapter 2.805.3c (version 1.2, issued May 4, 2026); *T.T.,* Docket No. 26-0647 (October 22, 2026).

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the July 15, 2026 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is set aside, and this case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this decision of the Board.

Issued: October 30, 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