United States Department of Labor
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

A.A., Appellant	)	
and	)	**Docket No. 26-0608**
	)	**Issued: September 25, 2026**
U.S. POSTAL SERVICE, RICHMOND CARRIER ANNEX, Richmond, KY, 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
VALERIE D. EVANS-HARRELL, Alternate Judge

JURISDICTION

On June 15, 2026 appellant filed a timely appeal from an April 28, 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.[2]

ISSUE

The issue is whether appellant has met her burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted January 27, 2026 employment incident.

[1] 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq*.

[2] The Board notes that, following the April 28, 2026 decision, OWCP received additional evidence. However, the Board's *Rules of Procedure* provides: "The Board's review of a case is limited to the evidence in the case record that was before OWCP at the time of its final decision. Evidence not before OWCP will not be considered by the Board for the first time on appeal." 20 C.F.R. § 501.2(c)(1). Thus, the Board is precluded from reviewing this additional evidence for the first time on appeal. *Id*.

FACTUAL HISTORY

On January 31, 2026 appellant, then a 41-year-old rural carrier associate, filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on January 27, 2026 she fractured two ribs on her left side when she slipped on ice and fell while in the performance of duty. She noted that at the time of the claimed work incident, the state that she was located in was under a state of emergency order due to an ice storm, and the roads had been deemed unsafe by local emergency agencies. On the reverse side of the claim form, the employing establishment acknowledged that appellant was injured in the performance of duty and that its knowledge of the facts about the injury agreed with her statements. Appellant stopped work on the date of the claimed injury and returned to full-time modified-duty work on February 14, 2026.

A computerized tomography (CT) scan of appellant's chest dated January 28, 2026 demonstrated minimally displaced fractures of the left 6th and 7th ribs.

In a February 19, 2026 development letter, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of her claim. It advised her of the type of factual and medical evidence required and provided a questionnaire for her completion. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to submit the necessary evidence.

OWCP subsequently received an emergency room report dated January 28, 2026 by Dr. Nashley Kyle Steele, Board-certified in emergency medicine, who noted that appellant related complaints of pain in her left lateral rib cage following an incident at work on January 27, 2026 wherein she slipped on ice, fell, and landed on the left side of her chest wall. Dr. Steele performed a physical examination and observed tenderness in the left lateral chest wall/ribs. He reviewed the CT scan and noted minimally displaced left 6th and 7th rib fractures without pneumothorax or pleural effusion. Dr. Steele diagnosed a fall and closed fractures of multiple ribs of the left side.

In a medical report dated February 16, 2026, Elizabeth Campbell, an advanced practice registered nurse, diagnosed closed fracture of multiple ribs of left side. In a note of even date, she released appellant to return to work with a 15-pound lifting restriction.

In a March 1, 2026 response to OWCP's development questionnaire, appellant indicated that she fell in the parking lot at work due to icy conditions and was unable to work for two weeks due to broken ribs.

In a follow-up letter dated March 23, 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 February 19, 2026 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. No further evidence was received.

By decision dated April 28, 2026, OWCP found that appellant had established that the January 27, 2026 employment incident had occurred, as alleged, and that a medical condition had been diagnosed. However, the claim remained denied as the evidence of record was insufficient to establish causal relationship between the diagnosed medical condition and the accepted January 27, 2026 employment incident. OWCP concluded, therefore, that appellant had not established an injury as defined by FECA.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

An employee seeking benefits under FECA[3] 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.[4] These are the essential elements of every compensation claim regardless of whether the claim is predicated on a traumatic injury or an occupational disease.[5]

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.[6]

The medical evidence required to establish causal relationship between a claimed specific condition and an employment incident is rationalized medical opinion evidence.[7] The opinion of the physician must be based on a complete factual and medical background of the employee, 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 identified by the claimant.[8]

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has met her burden of proof to establish left 6th and 7th rib fractures causally related to the accepted January 27, 2026 employment incident.

OWCP found that the January 27, 2026 employment incident, in which appellant slipped on ice and fell, had occurred at the time and place and in the manner alleged. Appellant provided medical evidence from Dr. Steele who noted that she slipped on ice, fell, and landed on the left side of her chest wall. He reviewed a January 28, 2026 CT scan and noted minimally displaced left 6th and 7th rib fractures without pneumothorax or pleural effusion. Dr. Steele diagnosed a fall and closed fractures of multiple ribs of left side. In clear-cut traumatic injury claims, where the

[3] 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq*.

[4] *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).

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

[6] *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).

[7] *S.S.*, Docket No. 19-0688 (issued January 24, 2020); *A.M.*, Docket No. 18-1748 (issued April 24, 2019); *Robert G. Morris*, 48 ECAB 238 (1996).

[8] *A.S.*, Docket No. 19-1955 (issued April 9, 2020); *Leslie C. Moore*, 52 ECAB 132 (2000).

fact of injury is established and is clearly competent to cause the condition described (for instance, a worker falls from a scaffold and breaks an arm), a fully-rationalized medical opinion is not needed. Dr. Steele's diagnosis and an affirmative statement are sufficient to accept the claim.[9] The Board finds, therefore, that this evidence is sufficient to establish that appellant sustained left 6th and 7th rib fractures on January 27, 2026.[10] The case will, therefore, be remanded for payment of medical expenses and any attendant disability.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has met her burden of proof to establish left 6th and 7th rib fractures causally related to the accepted January 27, 2026 employment incident.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the April 28, 2026 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is reversed.

Issued: September 25, 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

[9] Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *Causal Relationship*, Chapter 2.805.3.d(1) (version 1.1, issued April 24, 2026).

[10] *Id.*; *see also D.T.*, Docket No. 21-0091 (issued May 21, 2021).