United States Department of Labor
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

D.J., Appellant	)	
and	)	**Docket No. 26-0621**
	)	**Issued: September 24, 2026**
U.S. POSTAL SERVICE, KILMER POST OFFICE, Edison, NJ, 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
JANICE B. ASKIN, Judge
VALERIE D. EVANS-HARRELL, Alternate Judge

JURISDICTION

On June 23, 2026 appellant filed a timely appeal from April 1, May 12, and June 15, 2026 merit decisions 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 January 20, 2026 employment incident.

FACTUAL HISTORY

On January 21, 2026 appellant, then a 47-year-old city carrier, filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on January 20, 2026 she injured her lower back while in the performance of duty. She recounted that when returning to standing after bending to lift a package

[1] 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq*.

she experienced pain in her left lower back. Appellant stopped work on the date of injury and returned to full-duty work on March 3, 2026.

In a January 30, 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. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to respond. No response was received.

In a follow-up February 23, 2026 letter, OWCP advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review, and the evidence remained insufficient to establish her claim. It advised that she had 60 days from the January 30, 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.

On February 6, 2026 Dr. Faisal Mahmood, a Board-certified orthopedic surgeon, completed an attending physician's report (Form CA-20) diagnosing lumbago. He related that while appellant was bending over to lift a box at work she experienced sudden lumbar spine pain. Dr. Mahmood found that she was totally disabled.

On March 2 and 16, 2026 Dr. Mahmood completed duty status reports (Form CA-17) which diagnosed herniated lumbar discs at L3-4, L4-5, and L5-S1. He provided work restrictions. The record also contains illegible documents from a medical provider.

By decision dated April 1, 2026, OWCP denied appellant's claim finding that the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted January 20, 2026 employment incident.

In an April 20, 2026 Form CA-20, Dr. Mahmood related that appellant bent down to lift a box while at work. He reviewed electrodiagnostic studies demonstrating lumbar disc herniations at L3-4, L4-5, and L5-S1. Dr. Mahmood opined that the diagnosed conditions were caused or aggravated by an employment activity. He stated that appellant's pain began when she was bending over and lifting a box at work. Dr. Mahmood provided work restrictions.

On April 23 and 28, 2026 appellant requested reconsideration.

By decision dated May 12, 2026, OWCP denied modification.

OWCP received additional evidence. In a March 29, 2026 report, Dr. Mahmood related that appellant was bending over to lift while at work when she felt a "pop" sensation in her lumbar spine. Appellant underwent a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan which demonstrated left foraminal disc herniation at L3-4, L4-5, and left paracentral disc herniation at L5-S1. Dr. Mahmood determined that appellant's lumbar disc herniations were consistent with the described mechanism of injury. He opined that bending forward while lifting a heavy object placed significant axial and flexion forces across the lumbar spine, particularly on the intervertebral discs. Dr. Mahmood explained "[d]uring forward flexion, intradiscal pressure increases substantially, and when combined with the additional load of lifting a heavy object, excessive stress is placed on the annulus fibrosus." He concluded that appellant's current injury to her lumbar spine was directly and causally related to her work injury.

On May 30, 2026 appellant requested reconsideration.

By decision dated June 15, 2026, OWCP denied modification.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

When 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.[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]

The medical evidence required to establish causal relationship between a claimed specific condition and an employment incident is rationalized medical opinion evidence. 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.[6]

ANALYSIS

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

In his March 29, 2026 report, Dr. Mahmood recounted an accurate history of injury. He determined that appellant's lumbar disc herniations were consistent with the described mechanism of injury. Dr. Mahmood opined that bending forward while lifting a heavy object placed

[2] *Id.*

[3] *L.H.*, Docket No. 26-0201 (issued April 6, 2026); *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] *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).

significant axial and flexion forces across the lumbar spine, particularly on the intervertebral discs which can result in annular tearing and subsequent extrusion or protrusion of the nucleus pulposus material, leading to lumbar disc herniation. He concluded that appellant's current injury to her lumbar spine was directly and causally related to her work injury. Although Dr. Mahmood's opinion is insufficiently rationalized to establish causal relationship, it is sufficient to require further development of the medical opinion evidence.[7]

It is well established that proceedings under FECA are not adversarial in nature and, while appellant has the burden to establish entitlement to compensation, OWCP shares responsibility in the development of the evidence.[8] OWCP has an obligation to see that justice is done.

The Board shall, therefore, remand the case to OWCP for further development of the medical evidence. On remand, OWCP shall refer appellant, along with a statement of accepted facts and the case record, to a specialist in the appropriate field of medicine for a reasoned opinion regarding whether appellant sustained a lumbar spine condition causally related to the accepted January 20, 2026 employment incident. If the second opinion physician disagrees with the opinion of Dr. Mahmood, he or she must provide a fully-rationalized explanation of why the accepted employment incident is insufficient to have caused or contributed to appellant's medical condition. After this and other such further development as deemed necessary, OWCP shall issue a *de novo* decision.

CONCLUSION

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

[7] *J.B.,* Docket No. 26-0462 (issued August 11, 2026); *J.C*., Docket No. 26-0235 (issued April 30, 2026); *J.K.*, Docket No. 26-0015 (issued February 25, 2026); *G.M*., Docket No. 25-0728 (issued September 12, 2025); *J.H*., Docket No. 25-0565 (issued June 24, 2025); *L.N*., Docket No. 25-0173 (issued March 6, 2025); *J.K*., Docket No. 20-0816 (issued May 4, 2022); *M.H*., Docket No. 18-1068 (issued June 2, 2020); *D.S*., Docket No. 17-1359 (issued May 3, 2019); *X.V*., Docket No. 18-1360 (issued April 12, 2019); *C.M*., Docket No. 17-1977 (issued January 29, 2019); *E.J.,* Docket No. 09-1481 (issued February 19, 2010); *John J. Carlone*, 41 ECAB 354 (1989); *William J. Cantrell*, 34 ECAB 1223 (1983).

[8] *Id*.; *see also C.S*., Docket No. 24-0819 (issued October 16, 2024); *S.G*., Docket No. 22-0330 (issued April 4, 2023); *see M.G*., Docket No. 18-1310 (issued April 16, 2019); *Walter A. Fundinger, Jr*., 37 ECAB 200, 204 (1985); *Michael Gallo*, 29 ECAB 159, 161 (1978).

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the April 1, May 12, and June 15, 2026 decisions of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs are set aside and the case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this decision of the Board.

Issued: September 24, 2026
Washington, DC

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

Janice B. Askin, Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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