

ORM NEWS

From the Office of the
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs



June 2004

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



Triaging Investigations

As part of our continuing effort to improve our core service, EEO complaint processing, we have initiated changes to the manner in which we conduct investigations. Triaging is a process to categorize complaints for investigation and identify those that are appropriate for an abbreviated investigation through use of a new investigative method called Written Affidavit Investigations (WAI). We believe these changes will result in greater efficiency, better quality, and timelier service. The feedback I have received from you about the new process has been very positive.

Your willingness to try the new process and your suggestions for additional improvements have helped us to work smarter and reduce our old inventory of complaints. We have seen improvements in timeliness and the benefit of putting our cases in an electronic file for easier distribution.

I congratulate you for the improvements we have seen and I look forward to you continuing to share your ideas on how we can improve the processing of complaints.

Keep up the good work and have a safe and joyful 4th of July – our Nation's birthday.

James S. Jones

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Program Highlights

ORM OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management announced ORM's Ombudsman Program on June 9, 2004. The Ombudsman Program is designed to assist ORM employees in addressing internal workplace issues that effect how they perform their duties and it provides an alternative to the traditional grievance and EEO complaint processes.

ORM's organizational Ombudsman is a designated neutral or impartial dispute resolution practitioner whose major function is to provide confidential and informal assistance to all ORM employees. The Ombudsman acts as a source of information and referral, aids in answering employees' questions, and assists in the resolution of employee conflicts, concerns and other issues related to the workplace. The ORM Ombudsman is not an advocate for either the employee or ORM management. Copies of the Ombudsman program guide have been sent electronically to each employee.

For more information on this program, contact LaMont Johnson, ORM Ombudsman, at (202) 501-2925 or by e-mail. ■

What is Quality Assurance (QA)?

Quality assurance (QA): 1. All actions taken to ensure that standards and procedures are adhered to and that delivered products or services meet performance requirements. 2. The planned systematic activities necessary to ensure that a component, module, or system conforms to established technical requirements. 3. The policy, procedures, and systematic actions established in an enterprise for the purpose of providing and maintaining a specified degree of confidence in data integrity and accuracy throughout the lifecycle of the data, which includes input, update, manipulation, and output.

The bottom line; making sure that we deliver high quality, timely, and cost effective service that meet or exceed our customer's expectations and that those services ultimately help veterans.

To find out more about ORM's Quality Assurance Program and how it applies to the work we do in ORM, contact Peggy Joyner, Quality Assurance Manager, at (202) 501-2770 or by e-mail. Look for periodic QA Program updates in this newsletter. ■

ORM Announces New Complaint Investigative Method

ORM recently announced a change to the manner in which ORM conducts investigations to the Administrations (VHA, VBA, and NCA). This change will not result in any disruption in our service and will help ORM better utilize its resources. The Office of Management and Budget is requiring the Department to investigate all cases within 180 days. This means that ORM cannot have any cases over 180 days old pending acceptability or investigation as of September 30, 2004.

The changes developed and implemented by ORM include a triage process to categorize complaints as well as a new investigative methodology called Written Affidavit Investigations (WAI). The WAI investigative method will allow expedited completion of investigations for non-complex complaints and has been developed in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity Management Directive (EEO MD-110) and 29 CFR 1614.

WAI is an investigative method that may be used for certain types of disparate treatment, reprisal, and failure to accommodate complainants. The disparate treatment complaints may include non-selections, disciplinary actions, performance-based actions, cases with disability as a basis, and certain harassment/hostile work environment claims.

The goal of triaging complaints and using WAI is to improve the processing time of complaints by providing investigators with another investigative methodology that requires the expenditure of fewer resources but develops adequate factual records from which a determination of whether discrimination occurred can be made.

For more information, contact Rosa Franco, Regional EEO Manager, Northeastern Operations at (908) 604-5349.



EEOC MEETS WITH ORM TO DISCUSS VA'S SUCCESS IN PROCESSING EEO COMPLAINTS

On June 28, 2004, Alison Mangels, Executive Assistant to the Chief Operating Officer for ORM, met with Kathleen Eram from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to discuss VA's success in several complaint processing areas.

EEOC was impressed with VA's FY 2003 processing time of 89 days to complete procedural decisions. We informed Ms. Eram that our goal for procedural decisions is 45 days and that our current average processing time is 52 days. She was very impressed with our internal deadline of 45 days and our overall process for completing procedural decisions.

EEOC also commented on VA's FY 2003 average processing time of 233 days for investigations. Ms. Eram noted that with VA's high volume of complaints, 233 days is very good. She inquired as to how we were able to maintain the strong average. We attributed our success in both procedural decisions and investigations to our structure of full time investigators and intake specialists located in field offices throughout the country.

We informed Ms. Eram of our new investigative initiative of triaging cases. She was very pleased to hear we were looking at our process. As a former EEOC administrative judge, she often received voluminous complaint files. She is very supportive of the triage process and will share with us documents she has developed for certain types of cases that may assist us in this process. We will provide these documents to our investigators as soon as we have them.

We also discussed our complaint Web Based Tracking System, how it allows us to track nationally the progress of each office and to know where all cases are in the process at any given time.

Ms. Eram is also interviewing other federal agencies that have shown success in processing EEO complaints. She will be compiling this information and issuing a best practices report that she hopes will be published in October 2004. ■

One VA – Resolution is the Solution **Mid-South and Southeastern Operations Hold Joint EEO Managers Conference**

ORM's Southeastern Operations and Mid-South Operations, along with VISN's 7, 8, 9, & 16, sponsored a joint EEO Manager's Conference, the week of April 5-8, 2004, in San Destin, FL.

The theme for this year's conference, "One VA - Resolution is the Solution," focused on how we all can work to resolve and reduce workplace complaints and/or make available alternative dispute resolution programs. In attendance were medical center and regional office directors, EEO professionals, ADR coordinators and union officials. The three-day conference was well attended with over 240 participants. Regional Managers, Austin Lewis and Bill Low, would like to thank their staffs for their assistance and hard work in coordinating the conference. Without their efforts the conference would not have been a success.

Special thanks goes to Reginald Ware, Chief ITS and the ITS staff; Lewis Henson, Director, Learning Resources Office, his staff, and Brenda Lewis, Customer Service Manager, and her staff.

Additional information about the conference is available on ORM's Web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm> and <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/whatsnew.htm>.



President Expresses Nation's Gratitude to Federal Workers

In a statement released in connection with Public Service Recognition Week in May 2004, Office of Personnel Management Director, Kay Coles James said that federal workers are dedicated to improving their country.

"President George W. Bush has expressed the nation's gratitude for the public servants who 'touch lives, inspire others, and help us realize the promise and potential of our great nation,'" James said, as part of a tribute to Public Service Recognition Week.

"Throughout our history, we have been blessed with men and women of vision and character who have devoted their time and talents in service to their country and their fellow citizens." ■



Office Notes

EEO Manager for Western Operations

Monte Montesanto has been selected as the EEO Regional Manager for Western Operations. Mr. Montesanto comes to ORM from the Department of Homeland Security where he worked as a Management Analyst and Special Assistant. He has many years of EEO experience and holds a degree in finance from National University.

Mid-Atlantic Operations

Renee King, EEO Investigator, (on the right) recently received a ten-year government service award from David Betts, EEO Manager, Mid-Atlantic Operations. Renee, who began her career with ORM as an EEO Assistant, has also worked as an EEO Counselor.

Congratulations Renee!



Great Lakes Operations



Barbara Wilson-Coleman, with husband Drew, reacts with surprise at her entrance to her retirement dinner.

On May 20, 2004, the Great Lakes Operations staff surprised **Barbara Wilson-Coleman** with a retirement dinner held at the Mediterranean Party Center. Invitations were extended to the Cleveland and Brecksville VAMC's, where Barbara has provided counseling services for 23 years, to EEO Program Managers in the Great Lakes jurisdiction, and ORM employees.

Barbara arrived at the event thinking she was going to dinner at an upscale restaurant for a belated Mother's Day present from her daughter Vickie, who lives in North Dakota. She entered the ballroom with everyone (co-workers, family, friends and employees from the Medical Center) shouting surprise, to which she responded, "OH NO! You didn't" and before she could regain her composure, her brother-in-law shouted, "Here's surprise #2" and out came her son Curtis from New York and daughter Sharon from Fayetteville, NC.

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Judge Charetta Harrington of the Cleveland EEOC office was the keynote speaker. Judge Harrington shared highlights of the various EEO Counselor training trips Barbara and she had conducted together, including their last trip the first week of May to Dallas, TX. She talked about when they were on the same airplane with the singing group, The Temptations, and how Barbara, with her outgoing personality, started singing "My Girl" and obtained each of the Temptation's autographs.

Ty Halstead, Great Lakes Operations' Regional Manager, presented Barbara with a congratulatory letter from James S. Jones, DAS, for her many years of government service and a Certificate of Retirement. Barbara's son Curtis presented her with a Congressional Certificate of Service on behalf of Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs-Jones. Denene Burnette presented a gift from the Great Lakes staff; a beautiful Anne Klein watch engraved "ORM 2004." Her son also gave her a Mediterranean cruise, her daughter Sharon is taking her on a separate cruise, and daughter Vickie presented her with a beautiful necklace and bracelet.

Barbara left ORM on June 3, 2004. There was no work left on her desk. She spent her last weeks on the 1-800 line and helping counselors scan case files into the WBTS. She departed with her running shoes on... to enjoy traveling, visiting her children, and spending time with her husband.

[Thurman Story](#) and [Dottie Robinson](#), Intake Specialists, along with [Denene Burnette](#), [Ethel Bodiford](#), EEO Investigators, [Betty Brown](#) and [Sondra Oker](#), EEO Counselors, conducted training on harassment in the workplace for the employees and managers of the Tomah VA Medical Center from May 25 to May 27, 2004.

Administrative Assistant's Conference

By Carolyn McManus, EEO Program Assistant Trainee, Great Lakes Operations, Hines Satellite Office

On May 12 and 13, 2004, ORM employees from Great Lakes Operations and Mid-Atlantic Operations attended a conference for Administrative Assistants held at the Hilton Hotel in Cincinnati, OH. The two-day conference included workshops on practical time management, organizational skills, stress reduction, and life balancing solutions. ORM attendees were: (from left to right) Shirley Fulton, Ronnica (Ronnie) Snowden, Retina Clay, and Carolyn McManus. ■



Did You Know?

Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title VII



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, July 2, 1964
Photo courtesy - EEOC

July 2, 2004, marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In commemoration of this event the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which was established by the Act, is hosting a series of panel discussions that will examine the enactment and enforcement of Title VII of the Act. Title VII prohibits discrimination in employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, religion, and sex.

EEOC states that the discussions, on June 22, 23, and 30, 2004 at the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, DC, “will bring together many of the leading judges, lawyers, and activists involved in the passage of Title VII and its amendments and the litigation of the landmark cases interpreting Title VII and establishing the guidelines for proving workplace discrimination.” For more information, visit EEOC’s Web site www.eeoc.gov.

E-mail Essentials

The first way to use e-mail more effectively is to use e-mail sparingly. Because of the proliferation of e-mail, it's not uncommon to receive more than 50 e-mails a day. And the higher up the ladder a person is, the more e-mail they are likely to receive. By overusing the medium of electronic mail – each individual e-mail causes less and less effect. When considering whether to use e-mail for a particular document, consider if this information or message is important enough for e-mail. If not, send it some other way.

Points to remember:

- ❑ **Keep responses brief**
- ❑ **Be careful when sending attachments; downloading them may tie up the other person's computer.**
- ❑ **Viruses are passed through attachments.**
- ❑ **Stop forwarding junk mail.**
- ❑ **Don't be tempted to forward new virus warnings. If you get one from a concerned friend, e-mail it to your IT department and let someone there decide what to do with it.**

By sending only important e-mails, people will know that when they see e-mail from you that it must be important and will give it the consideration it deserves.

ORM News is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Contact Terry Washington, External Affairs Program, by e-mail or by calling (202) 501-2800 concerning the contents of this newsletter. Back copies of the newsletter are available at <http://www.va.gov/orm>.