

U.S. Department of Labor

Office of Administrative Law Judges
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Issue Date: 27 May 2010

CASE NO.: 2009-STA-10

In the Matter of:

CHRISTI SIMON
Complainant

v.

APET, INC.
Respondent

RECOMMENDED ORDER APPROVING SETTLEMENT AND DISMISSING CASE

This proceeding arises from a complaint filed by Christi Simon against Apet, Inc. This proceeding arises under Section 405, the employee protection provision, of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) of 1982 (49 U.S.C. § 31105) and the regulations promulgated thereunder (29 C.F.R. Part 1978 (2004)). By letter dated April 6, 2010, counsel for the respondent informed the court that the parties had reached a settlement. On April 7, 2010, the respondent was informed by telephone that the undersigned would allow the parties thirty (30) days in which to submit the signed settlement agreement. On May 25, 2010, the signed settlement was received by this court.

The Act and implementing regulations provide that a proceeding under the Act may be ended prior to entry of a final order by a settlement agreement between the parties. 49 U.S.C. § 31105(b)(2)(C); 29 C.F.R. § 1978.111(d)(2). The Administrative Law Judge's role in reviewing the parties' settlement agreement is limited to ascertaining whether the terms of the agreement fairly, adequately and reasonably settle the Complainant's allegations that the Respondent violated the Act. *Ass't Sec'y & Zurenda v. Corporate Express Delivery Systems, Inc.*, ARB No. 00-041, OALJ No. 1999-STA-30 (ARB March 31, 2000) (*Zurenda*); *Champlin v. Florilli Corp.*, OALJ No. 1991-STA-7 (Sec'y May 20, 1992).

Pursuant to the requirements of the Act and the implementing regulations, I have carefully reviewed the terms of the parties' Settlement Agreement, and I have determined that it constitutes a fair, adequate and reasonable settlement of the complaint.

The eighth numbered paragraph (numbered as second paragraph 5) of the agreement provide that the parties shall keep the terms of the settlement confidential, with certain specified exceptions. We again emphasize that "[t]he parties' submissions, including the agreement

become part of the record of the case and are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C.A. § 552 (West 1996). FOIA requires Federal agencies to disclose requested records unless they are exempt from disclosure under the Act. *Coffman v. Alyeska Pipeline Serv. Co. and Arctic Slope Inspection Serv.*, ARB No. 96-141, ALJ Nos. 96-TSC-5, 6, slip op. at 2 (ARB June 24, 1996). Department of Labor regulations provide specific procedures for responding to FOIA requests, for appeals by requestors from denials of such requests, and for protecting the interests of submitters of confidential commercial information. *See* 29 C.F.R. Part 70 (2003).¹

ACCORDINGLY, it is hereby RECOMMENDED that:

1. The Settlement Agreement and Mutual Reciprocal Release be APPROVED; and
2. The complaint of Christi Simon be DISMISSED with prejudice.

A

DANIEL L. LELAND
Administrative Law Judge

NOTICE OF REVIEW: The administrative law judge's Recommended Order Approving Settlement, along with the Administrative File, will be automatically forwarded for review to the Administrative Review Board, U. S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20210. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 1978.109(a); Secretary's Order 1-2002, ¶4.c(35), 67 Fed. Reg. 64272 (2002).

Within thirty (30) days of the date of issuance of the administrative law judge's Recommended Order Approving Settlement, the parties may file briefs with the Administrative Review Board ("Board") in support of, or in opposition to, the administrative law judge's order unless the Board, upon notice to the parties, establishes a different briefing schedule. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 1978.109 (c)(2). All further inquiries and correspondence in this matter should be directed to the Board.

¹ Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 70.26(b), submitters may designate specific information as confidential commercial information to be handled as provided in the regulations. When FOIA requests are received for such information, the Department of Labor will notify the submitter promptly, 29 C.F.R. § 70.26(c); the submitter will be given a reasonable amount of time to state its objections to disclosure, 29 C.F.R. § 70.26(e); and the submitter will be notified if a decision is made to disclose the information, 29 C.F.R. § 70.26(f). If the information is withheld and a suit is filed by the requester to compel disclosure, the submitter will be notified, 29 C.F.R. § 70.26(h)." *Coffman*, slip op. at 2, n.2.