

**MODEL EMPLOYMENT DISPUTE RESOLUTION PLAN**  
**FOR THE**  
**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
**DISTRICT OF VERMONT**



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**Approved by:**

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**WILLIAM K. SESSIONS III**  
**CHIEF JUDGE**

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# MODEL EMPLOYMENT DISPUTE RESOLUTION PLAN

## U.S. DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF VERMONT

### CHAPTER I - GENERAL PROVISIONS

#### § 1 Preamble.

This Plan shall be known as the *Federal Judiciary Model Employment Dispute Resolution (EDR) Plan* for the District of Vermont. The District of Vermont's *Plan* mirrors the Model EDR Plan as adopted by the Judicial Conference of the United States and provides rights and protections to employees of the United States courts which are comparable to those provided to legislative branch employees under the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995.

This *Plan* supersedes Appendix I ("Discrimination and Complaint Procedures") of the current Judiciary Model Equal Employment Opportunity Plan ("Model EEO Plan"), except for Section VI of Appendix I ("Annual Report") imposing requirements on the courts. Claims arising under Chapters II through VII of this Plan, or under Sections I through VII of the Judiciary's Model EEO Plan, shall be treated in accordance with the procedures set forth in Chapter VIII of this *Plan*. The duties of the court's EEO Coordinator will be assumed by the Employment Dispute Resolution Coordinator (established in Section 3 of Chapter VIII of this *Plan*), except that the dispute resolution duties assigned to the EEO Coordinator under the Model EEO Plan will be replaced by the dispute resolution procedures set forth in Chapter VIII of this *Plan*.

This *Plan* is to be implemented in the same manner as the Model EEO Plan. Upon approval of this *Plan* by the Judicial Conference, each court shall adopt and implement a local plan based thereon. Any modification of this *Plan* by a court must first be approved by the judicial council of its corresponding circuit. A copy of each plan and any subsequent modifications shall be filed with the Administrative Office. Each court shall annually submit a report on the implementation of its plan to the Administrative Office for inclusion in the Director's Annual Report to the Judicial Conference.

Policies adopted by individual courts pertaining to adverse action or general grievance proceedings that do not invoke the rights and protections afforded under the Model EDR Plan are not affected by this *Plan*. Further, local policies relating to rights enumerated under the Model EDR Plan that are not inconsistent with the rights and procedures established herein will not be affected by this *Plan*.

The Model EDR Plan is not intended to duplicate the protections provided for the resolution of complaints of judicial officer misconduct or disability under 28 U.S.C. § 372(c) and otherwise is intended to be the exclusive remedy of the employee relating to rights enumerated under the Model EDR Plan.

§ 2 **Scope of Coverage.**

Except as provided herein, this *Plan* applies to all judicial and non-judicial officers and employees of the United States District Court for the District of Vermont as well as to former court employees with respect to events which occurred during the period of their employment with the court. This *Plan* does *not* apply to: interns, externs, applicants for a court position (including law clerk applicants), private attorneys, persons appointed pursuant to the Criminal Justice Act, and other individuals who are not officially under the employ of the court.

§ 3 **Definitions.** For purposes of this *Plan*,

- A. The term "employee" includes all individuals listed in Section 2 *supra* and any person who is appointed and officially provides service to the court in exchange for financial compensation. The term "employee" does *not* include: applicants for bankruptcy or magistrate judge positions, private attorneys or other persons who apply to represent indigent defendants under the Criminal Justice Act, criminal defense investigators and other staff not employed by the Federal Public Defender, volunteer counselors, mediators, or evaluators (including the court's ENE panel attorneys), non-staff interpreters, contract court reporters, and other individuals who are not members of an "employing office" as that term is defined below.
- B. The term "employing office" includes all offices and units of the United States District Court for the District of Vermont including the offices of the Clerk of Court, the United States Probation and Pretrial Services Offices, and judicial chambers staff (which includes *pro se* staff attorneys and official court reporters).
- C. The term "judicial officer" means a judge appointed under Article III of the United States Constitution or a United States magistrate judge appointed by the district court.
- D. The term "court" refers to the United States District Court for the District of Vermont. In the case of disputes involving the Federal Public Defender, the term "court" refers to the appropriate court of appeals.

§ 4 **Distribution.**

A copy of this *Plan* (and any subsequent modifications) shall be provided to each employee in active service with the court by either the District's EDR Coordinator or the appointing official for the particular office or court unit in question.

## CHAPTER II - EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION RIGHTS

### § 1 General.

Discrimination against employees based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual harassment or sexual orientation), national origin, age (at least 40 years of age at the time of the alleged discrimination), and disability is prohibited. The rights and protections of Sections I through VII of this District's *Model Equal Employment Opportunity Plan* shall also apply to employees.

### § 2 Disability. For purposes of this *Plan*, the term "disability" shall mean:

- A. a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an employee,
- B. a record of such an impairment, or
- C. being regarded as having such an impairment.

*See 42 U.S.C. § 12102(2).*

### § 3 Special Provision for Probation and Pretrial Services Officers.

The age discrimination provision of Section I of this Chapter shall not apply to the initial hiring of probation and pretrial services officers. *See* Report of the proceedings of the Judicial Conference of the United States (March 1991), pp. 16-17.

### § 4 Sexual Harassment.

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination based upon gender and can involve a wide variety of unwanted, unwelcome and repeated behaviors, included but not limited to: sexually suggestive statements or questions, sexual innuendo, offensive touching and/or patting, and sexual bribery where one of the following applies:

- A. Submitting to such conduct is either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment, position, pay, recruitment, hiring, promotion, advancement and/or training; or
- B. Submitting to or rejecting such conduct is a basis for career or employment decisions affecting the employee; or
- C. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the employee's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

§ 5 **EEO Practices and Policies.**

Each employing office shall apply equal employment opportunity practices and policies within the workplace. These include providing each employee a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate his or her skills and recognizing exceptional performance through merit awards and other appropriate personnel actions as resources of the employing office permit. Each employing office shall adhere to the following practices:

- A. **Recruitment.** Each position to be filled shall be publicly announced in a way to attract candidates who are broadly representative of the qualified labor market;
- B. **Hiring and Promotion.** Hiring and promotional decisions shall be based solely on job-related criteria; and
- C. **Advancement.** As the needs and resources of the employing office reasonably permit, employee skills, abilities and potential shall be identified and developed through cross-training, reassignments, job restructuring (when appropriate), special assignments, outside job-related training or other practical means.

§ 6 **Annual Report.**

At the end of each fiscal year, the EDR Coordinator will collect, analyze, and consolidate statistical and other data from each employing office regarding the recruitment, hiring, promotion and advancement activities during the preceding twelve months and will report this data to the Chief Judge and to the Administrative Office. This report will also, as appropriate, describe the Court's achievements in providing equal employment opportunities, identify any areas where improvement may be needed, and explain any factors inhibiting the attainment of EEO objectives. In addition, the report will collect data regarding complaints and dispute resolution proceedings under this *Plan*. The report will specifically include the following data:

- A. The number of complaints initiated under this *Plan*;
- B. The types of complaints initiated under this *Plan* according to race, gender (including sexual harassment or sexual orientation), national origin, religion, age, and disability; and
- C. The number of complaints resolved informally, the number of complaints resolved formally without hearing, and the number of complaints resolved with a hearing.

## CHAPTER III - FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE RIGHTS

### § 1 General.

Title II of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, 29 U.S.C. § 2611, applies to court employees in the manner prescribed in Volume I-C, Chapter X, Subchapter 1630.1, Section R, of the *Guide to Judiciary Policies and Procedures*.

## CHAPTER IV - WORKER ADJUSTMENT AND RETRAINING NOTIFICATION RIGHTS

### § 1 General.

No “employing office closing” or “mass layoff” (as defined in Section 2 of this Chapter) may occur until the end of a 60-day period after the employing office serves written notice of such prospective closing or layoff to employees who will be affected. This provision shall not apply to an employing office closing or mass layoff that results from the absence of appropriated funds.

### § 2 Definitions.

- A. The term "employing office closing" means the permanent or temporary shutdown of a single site of employment if the shutdown results in an employment loss at the single site of employment during any 30-day period for 50 or more employees excluding any part-time employees.
- B. The term "mass layoff" means a reduction in force which--
  - 1. is not the result of an employing office closing; and
  - 2. results in an employment loss at the single site of employment during any 30-day period for
    - a. (1) at least 33 percent of the employees (excluding any part-time employees); and
    - (2) at least 50 employees (excluding any part-time employees); or
    - b. at least 500 employees (excluding any part-time employees).

*See 29 U.S.C. § 2101.*

## CHAPTER V - EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS OF MEMBERS OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES

### § 1 General.

An employing office shall not discriminate against an eligible employee or deny an eligible employee reemployment rights or benefits under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, 38 U.S.C. § 4301 et seq.

## CHAPTER VI - OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH PROTECTIONS

### § 1 General.

Each employing office shall provide to its employees a place of employment which is free from recognized hazards that cause or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees. Complaints which seek a remedy that is exclusively within the jurisdiction of the General Services Administration (“GSA”) or the United States Postal Service (“USPS”) to provide are not cognizable under this Plan; such requests should be filed directly with GSA or the USPS as appropriate.

### § 2 Court Program Requirements.

The objective of the District of Vermont’s occupational safety and health protection program is to promote a safe working environment. The core of Vermont’s program rests upon identifying, minimizing or eliminating any potential conditions which may impose health risk or affect occupational safety.

#### **A. Assignment of responsibilities.**

- A. Staff.** All conditions which an employee believes to be hazardous, unsafe, or unsound to one’s health or occupational safety shall be brought to the *immediate* attention of management, preferably in writing. Management shall acknowledge notice of any potentially unsafe situation by recording the date and time such notice is given. All employees shall be subject to, and shall abide by, occupational safety policies as implemented by management.
- 2. Management.** Managers and supervisors of each court and court-support unit are responsible for the health, safety and welfare of their employees. To the extent practical and reasonable, management shall ensure that the employee workplace is free from recognized occupational hazards or unsafe working conditions. Court managers retain the responsibility for taking appropriate action of notifying the building landlord (i.e. GSA or the U.S. Postal Service, etc.) of any unsafe working conditions and for taking whatever action, including site evacuation, which is deemed appropriate under the specific circumstances at hand. All managers and



court supervisors should abide by any recommended therapies issued to court employees by qualified health care providers or occupational health specialists.

## CHAPTER VII - POLYGRAPH TESTS

### § 1 General.

No employee may be required to take a polygraph test.

## CHAPTER VIII - DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCEDURES

### § 1 General Procedure for Consideration of Alleged Violations.

An employee who claims a denial of the rights granted under Chapters II through VII of this *Plan* shall seek resolution of such claims through the procedures of this Chapter. Generally, the procedural process consists of--

- A. counseling and mediation;
- B. hearing before the chief judge of the court (or a designated judicial officer) in which the alleged violation arises; and
- C. review of the hearing decision under procedures established by the judicial council of the circuit.

### § 2 General Provisions and Protections.

- A. **Prohibition against retaliation.** Complainants under this *Plan* have the right to be free from retaliation, coercion, or interference because of filing a complaint pursuant to this *Plan*. Likewise, any person who participates in the filing or processing of a complaint, such as an employment dispute resolution coordinator, mediator, witness, representative, or co-worker, is also entitled to freedom from retaliation.
- B. **Right to representation.** Every individual invoking the dispute resolution procedures of this *Plan* has the right to be represented by a person of his or her choice if such person is available and consents to be a representative. A court employee may accept the responsibilities of representation if it will not unduly interfere with his or her court duties or constitute a conflict of interest, as determined by the representative's appointing officer.
- C. **Case preparation.** To the extent feasible, every individual invoking the dispute resolution procedures of this *Plan* may use a reasonable amount of

official time to prepare his or her case, so long as it does not unduly interfere with the performance of his or her court duties.

**D. Extensions of time.** The chief judge of the court, or other presiding judicial officer, may extend any of the deadlines set forth in this Chapter for good cause.

**E. Records.** At the conclusion of formal and informal proceedings under this *Plan*, all papers, files, and reports will be filed with the court's Employment Dispute Resolution (EDR) Coordinator. No papers, files, or reports relating to a dispute will be filed in any employee's personnel folder, except as necessary to implement an official personnel action.

### § 3 **Designation and Duties of Employment Dispute Resolution Coordinator.**

The EDR Coordinator for the District of Vermont is Jeffrey S. Eaton. The duties of the EDR Coordinator include the following:

- A. to provide information to the court and employees regarding the rights and protections afforded under this *Plan*;
- B. to coordinate and organize the procedures and establish and maintain official files of the court pertaining to complaints and other matters initiated and processed under the court's employment dispute resolution plan;
- C. to coordinate the counseling of individuals in the initial stages of the complaint process, in accordance with Section 5 of this Chapter; and
- D. to collect, analyze, and consolidate statistical data and other information pertaining to the court's employment dispute resolution process.

### § 4 **General Disqualification Provision.**

Any employee making a claim pursuant to these EDR procedures who believes that a conflict of interest exists between a judicial officer, an employee or other person directly involved with the employee's claim may seek disqualification of such individual by recusal.

- A. **Requests for Recusal.** Recusal requests must be made in *writing* and must be directed to the judicial officer, counselor, mediator, or EDR Coordinator to whom the employee believes to be impartial. Specific reason(s) for disqualification must be provided by the employee. All requests for recusal will be treated as confidential and must be acted upon promptly by the recipient no later than ten (10) business days after the request for disqualification is received.

**B. Appeal.** Denials for recusal may be appealed to the chief judge of the district within five (5) business days. The chief judge of the district shall retain final authority to resolve *local* EDR conflicts of interest and shall retain the power to appoint alternate EDR officials, including the reviewing official and/or hearing officer.

§ 5 Counseling.

**A. Initiating a proceeding; formal request for counseling.** An employee who believes that his or her rights under Chapters II through VII of this *Plan* have been violated must first request counseling.

**B. Form and manner of requests.** Requests for counseling:

1. are to be submitted to the court's EDR Coordinator;
2. must be made in writing; and
3. must be made within 30 days of the alleged violation or within 30 days of the time the employee becomes aware of the alleged violation.

**C. Procedures**

1. **Who may serve as counselor.** The counseling shall be conducted by the court's EDR Coordinator, unless the EDR Coordinator is disqualified from serving as counselor under Section 4 of this Chapter, or is otherwise unavailable. In such instances, the chief judge of the court shall designate another qualified individual to perform the counseling function. If the dispute involves an alleged violation of this *Plan* by a judicial officer, the person who conducts the counseling shall be a judicial officer designated by the chief judge.
2. **Purposes of counseling.** The purposes of the counseling shall be to discuss the employee's concerns and elicit information regarding the matter which the employee believes constitutes a violation; to advise the employee of his or her rights and responsibilities and the procedures of the court applicable to the employment dispute resolution process; to evaluate the matter; and to assist the employee in achieving an early resolution of the matter, if possible.
3. **Confidentiality.** All counseling shall be kept confidential unless the employee agrees in writing to waive confidentiality of the counseling process for the purpose of allowing the designated counselor to contact the employing office or to attempt a resolution of the disputed matter. A written record of all such contacts must be kept by the counselor and made available for review by the affected person(s).

- 4. Form of settlement.** The EDR Coordinator shall reduce to writing any settlement achieved during the counseling process and secure the signatures of the employee, his or her representative, if any, and the member of the employing office who is authorized to enter into settlement on the employing office's behalf.
  
- D. Duration of counseling period.** The period for counseling shall be 30 days (or a shorter period if counseling is concluded at an earlier date), beginning on the date that the request for counseling is received by the EDR Coordinator.
  
- E. Conclusion of the counseling period and notice.** The EDR Coordinator shall notify the employee in writing of the end of the counseling period. As part of the notice, the EDR Coordinator shall inform the employee of the right and obligation, should the employee choose to pursue his or her claim, to file with the EDR Coordinator a request for mediation in accordance with Section 6 of this Chapter.

**§ 6    Mediation.**

- A. Initiation.** Within 15 days after receipt by the employee of the notice of the conclusion of the counseling period, the employee may file with the EDR Coordinator a request for mediation. The request must be made in writing and must state the claim(s) presented. Failure to pursue mediation will preclude further processing of the employee's claim under any other provisions of this Chapter.
  
- B. Procedures.**
  - 1. Designation of mediator.** As soon as possible after receiving the request for mediation, the EDR Coordinator shall designate a mediator and provide written notice of such designation.
  
  - 2. Who may serve as mediator.** Any person with the skills to assist in resolving disputes, except the court's EDR Coordinator, may serve as a mediator under this *Plan*. If the complaint alleges that a judicial officer has violated the rights protected by this *Plan*, the mediator shall be a judicial officer designated by the chief judge.
  
  - 3. Purpose of mediation.** The mediator shall meet separately and/or jointly with the employee and his or her representative, if any, and the employing office to discuss alternatives for resolving a dispute, including any and all possibilities of reaching a voluntary, mutually satisfactory resolution.
  
  - 4. Confidentiality.** Any person or party involved in the mediation process shall not disclose, in whole or in part, any information or records obtained through, or prepared specifically for, the mediation process, except as necessary to consult with the parties or their representatives, and then only

with notice to all parties. A written record of all such contacts must be kept and made available for review by the affected person(s). In addition, in the event the employee files a complaint pursuant to Section 7 of this Chapter, the hearing officer shall have access to the record of any claims raised in mediation.

**5. Form of settlement.** The mediator shall reduce to writing any settlement achieved during the mediation process and secure the signature of the employee, his or her representative, if any, and the member of the employing office who is authorized to enter into settlement on the employing office's behalf.

**C. Duration of mediation period.** The mediation period shall be 30 days (or a shorter period if mediation is concluded at an earlier date), beginning on the date the request for mediation is received. The employee is required to attend at least one mediation session. Thereafter, he or she may proceed to file a complaint.

**D. Conclusion of mediation period and notice.** If, at the end of the mediation period, the parties have not resolved the matter that forms the basis of the request for mediation, the EDR Coordinator shall provide the employee, the employee's representative, if any, and the employing office with written notice that the mediation period has concluded. The notice shall also inform the employee of his or her right to file a complaint under Section 7 of this Chapter.

## **§ 7 Complaint, Review and Hearing.**

**A. Complaint.** Not later than 15 days after receiving notice of the end of the mediation period, an employee may file a complaint. The complaint shall be in writing, shall identify the complainant and all involved parties and individuals, and shall set forth a short and plain statement of the complainant's claim and the remedy being sought. The complaint shall also include a brief summary of the reasons why the employee believes that counseling and mediation efforts were ineffective. The respondent shall be the employing office which would be responsible for redressing, correcting or abating the violation(s) alleged in the complaint. No individual shall be named as a respondent in the complaint.

### **B. Review of pleadings.**

**1. Reviewing official.** The complaint and any other documents shall be filed with the EDR Coordinator who shall forward them for review by the chief judge of the court, or by another judicial officer of the court designated by the chief judge. In the event the chief judge is disqualified under Section 4 of this Chapter, or is unavailable to serve under this subsection, the reviewing official shall automatically become the next senior Article III district judge of the court. In the case of a complaint alleging that an Article III judge has violated rights protected

by the *Plan*, that judge may elect to have a hearing conducted by a judge of another court, as designated by the judicial council of the circuit. Any designation of a judicial officer from another court to hear and decide the case shall be arranged by agreement of the chief judges of the affected courts.

2. **Review procedures.** After notice to the complainant and an opportunity to respond, the chief judge or designated judicial officer may dismiss in writing any complaint that is found to be frivolous, unduly repetitive of a previous complaint, that fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or that makes claims that were not advanced in mediation.

### C. Hearing procedures.

1. **Hearing officer.** If the chief judge or designated judicial officer does not dismiss the complaint under the preceding subsection, the chief judge or designated judicial officer, acting as the hearing officer, shall hold a hearing on the merits of the complaint unless he or she determines that no material factual dispute exists.
2. **Specific provisions.** The presiding judicial officer may provide for such discovery and investigation as is necessary. In general, the presiding judicial officer shall determine the time, place, and manner of conducting the hearing. However, the following specific provisions shall apply to hearings conducted under this Section:
  - a. the hearing shall be commenced no later than 60 days after the filing of the complaint;
  - b. the complainant and the head of the office against which the complaint has been filed must receive written notice of the hearing; such notice shall also be provided to the individual alleged to have violated rights protected by this Plan whenever such individual is a judicial officer or when the presiding judicial officer otherwise determines such notice to be appropriate;
  - c. at the hearing, the complainant will have the rights to representation, to present evidence on his or her behalf, and to cross-examine adverse witnesses; the employing office will have the rights to present evidence on its behalf and to cross-examine adverse witnesses;
  - d. a verbatim record of the hearing must be kept and shall be the sole official record of the proceeding;
  - e. in reaching his or her decision, the chief judge or designated judicial officer shall be guided by judicial and administrative decisions under the laws related to Chapters II through VII of this *Plan* and by decisions of the judicial council of the appropriate circuit under Section 8 of this Chapter;

- f. remedies may be provided in accordance with Section 9 of this Chapter where the hearing officer finds that the complainant has established by a preponderance of the evidence that a substantive right protected by this *Plan* has been violated;
- g. the final decision of the chief judge or designated judicial officer must be issued in writing not later than 30 days after the conclusion of the hearing; and
- h. all parties, or any aggrieved individual, shall have the right to written notice of any action taken as a result of a hearing.

**§ 8 Review of Decision.**

A party or individual aggrieved by a final decision of the chief judge or designated judicial officer, or by a summary dismissal of the complaint, may petition for review of that decision under procedures established by the judicial council of the circuit. Any review will be conducted by a judicial officer(s), based on the record created by the hearing officer, and shall be affirmed if supported by substantial evidence.

**§ 9 Remedies.**

- A. Where judicial officers acting pursuant to section 7 or 8 of this *Plan* find that a substantive right protected by this *Plan* has been violated, they may order a necessary and appropriate remedy. A remedy may be directed at correcting a past violation, prospectively insuring compliance with the rights protected by this *Plan*, or both. A remedy shall be tailored as closely as possible to the specific violation involved.
- B. Remedies which may be provided to successful complainants under this *Plan* include, but are not limited to:
  1. placement of an employee in a position previously denied;
  2. placement in a comparable alternative position;
  3. reinstatement to a position from which previously removed;
  4. prospective promotion to a position;
  5. priority consideration for a future promotion or position;
  6. back pay and associated benefits, including attorney's fees, where the statutory criteria of the Back Pay Act, 5 U.S.C. § 5596, are satisfied;
  7. records modification and/or expungement;
  8. "equitable" relief, such as temporary stays of adverse actions;

9. granting of family and medical leave; and
10. accommodation of disabilities through the purchase of specialized equipment or the restructuring of duties and work hours.

C. Remedies which are *not* legally available include:

1. payment of attorney's fees (except as authorized under the Back Pay Act);
2. compensatory damages; and
3. punitive damages.

**§ 10 Record of Final Decisions.**

Final decisions under this *Plan* shall be made available to the public upon written request to the chief judge of the court through the EDR Coordinator. Documents *other than the final decision* will only be released to the public pursuant to the decision of the chief judge of this court consistent with the protection of the privacy interests of the affected parties.

**§ 11. Deadlines.**

Consistent with Section 2. D. of Chapter VIII of this *Plan*, any deadline specified herein may be extended for good cause shown upon application to the chief judge of this court.



