

STATE OF FLORIDA
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

LESTER L. WASHINGTON,

EEOC Case No. 15D201700511

Petitioner,

FCHR Case No. 2017-00803

v.

DOAH Case No. 18-0367

ESCAMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT,

FCHR Order No. 18-054

Respondent.

**FINAL ORDER DISMISSING PETITION FOR
RELIEF FROM AN UNLAWFUL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE**

Preliminary Matters

On April 11, 2017, Petitioner Lester L. Washington filed a complaint of discrimination pursuant to the Florida Civil Rights Act of 1992, Sections 760.01 - 760.11, Florida Statutes (2016), alleging that Respondent Escambia County School District committed an unlawful employment practice against Petitioner on the bases of race, gender, age, and retaliation for engaging in a protected activity, by terminating his employment and removing him from Respondent's authorized list of substitute teachers.

The allegations set forth in the complaint were investigated, and, on December 15, 2017, the Executive Director issued a determination finding that there was no reasonable cause to believe that an unlawful employment practice had occurred.

On January 1, 2018, Petitioner filed a Petition for Relief from an Unlawful Employment Practice, and the case was transmitted to the Division of Administrative Hearings for the conduct of a formal proceeding.

An evidentiary hearing was held in Pensacola, Florida, on May 10 and June 5, 2018, before Administrative Law Judge James H. Peterson, III.

Judge Peterson issued a Recommended Order of dismissal, dated October 3, 2018.

The Commission panel designated below considered the record of this matter and determined the action to be taken on the Recommended Order.

Findings of Fact

A transcript of the proceeding before the Administrative Law Judge was not filed with the Commission. In the absence of a transcript of the proceeding before the Administrative Law Judge, the Recommended Order is the only evidence for the Commission to consider. See National Industries, Inc. v. Commission on Human Relations, et al., 527 So. 2d 894, at 897, 898 (Fla. 5th DCA 1988). Accord, Coleman v. Daytona Beach, Ocean Center Parking Garage, FCHR Order No. 14-034 (September 10, 2014), Gantz, et al. v. Zion's Hope, Inc., d/b/a Holy

Land Experience, FCHR Order No. 11-048 (June 6, 2011), and Hall v. Villages of West Oaks HOA, FCHR Order No. 08-007 (January 14, 2008).

We adopt the Administrative Law Judge's findings of fact.

Conclusions of Law

We find the Administrative Law Judge's application of the law to the facts to result in a correct disposition of the matter.

We adopt the Administrative Law Judge's conclusions of law.

Exceptions

Petitioner filed exceptions to the Administrative Law Judge's Recommended Order, on October 18, 2018, with amendments filed on October 23 and October 24, 2018. The final exceptions document was 187 pages.

Petitioner provided extensive explanation of why he disagreed with how the hearing proceeded in a manner that did not comply with the Administrative Procedure Act. However, Petitioner also generally excepts to the inferences drawn from the evidence presented as set out in the Recommended Order paragraphs 3 through 25, the Recommendation, the End Note, and to the finding that no unlawful employment practice occurred.

As indicated, above, no transcript of the proceeding before the Administrative Law Judge was filed with the Commission.

In the absence of a transcript of the proceeding before the Administrative Law Judge, the Commission is bound by the facts found in the Recommended Order, since there is no way for the Commission to determine the extent to which the facts found are supported by the testimony presented. See, e.g., Gainey v. Winn Dixie Stores, Inc., FCHR Order No. 07-054 (October 12, 2007), Herring v. Department of Corrections, FCHR Order No. 12-004 (February 21, 2012) and Holloman v. Lee Wesley Restaurants, d/b/a Burger King, FCHR Order No. 14-041 (October 9, 2014).

With regard to findings of fact set out in Recommended Orders, the Administrative Procedure Act states, "The agency may not reject or modify the findings of fact unless the agency first determines from a review of *the entire record*, and states with particularity in the order, that the findings of fact were not based on competent substantial evidence or that the proceedings on which the findings were based did not comply with the essential requirements of law [emphasis added]." Section 120.57(1)(1), Florida Statutes (2018). As indicated, above, in the absence of a transcript of the proceeding before the Administrative Law Judge, the Recommended Order is the only evidence for the Commission to consider. See, National Industries, Inc., supra. Accord, Hall, supra, Jones v. Suwannee County School Board, FCHR Order No. 06-088 (September 11, 2006), Johnson v. Tree of Life, Inc., FCHR Order No 05-087 (July 12, 2005), Coleman, supra, and Gantz, supra.

Further, the Commission has stated, "It is well settled that it is the Administrative Law Judge's function 'to consider all of the evidence presented and reach ultimate conclusions of fact based on competent substantial evidence by resolving conflicts, judging the credibility of witnesses and drawing permissible inferences therefrom. If the evidence presented supports two inconsistent findings, it is the Administrative Law Judge's role to decide between them.' Beckton v. Department of Children and Family Services, 21 F.A.L.R. 1735, at 1736 (FCHR

1998), citing Maggio v. Martin Marietta Aerospace, 9 F.A.L.R. 2168, at 2171 (FCHR 1986).” Barr v. Columbia Ocala Regional Medical Center, 22 F.A.L.R. 1729, at 1730 (FCHR 1999). Accord, Bowles v. Jackson County Hospital Corporation, FCHR Order No. 05-135 (December 6, 2005) and Eaves v. IMT-LB Central Florida Portfolio, LLC, FCHR Order No. 11-029 (March 17, 2011).

In addition, it has been stated, “The ultimate question of the existence of discrimination is a question of fact.” Florida Department of Community Affairs v. Bryant, 586 So. 2d 1205, at 1209 (Fla. 1st DCA 1991). Accord, Coley v. Bay County Board of County Commissioners, FCHR Order No. 10-027 (March 17, 2010) and Eaves, supra.

Petitioner also objected to paragraphs 29 through 42 in the Conclusions of Law section of the Recommended Order. However, as stated above, we accept the Administrative Law Judge’s conclusions of law.

Petitioner’s exceptions are rejected.

Dismissal


The Petition for Relief and Complaint of Discrimination are DISMISSED with prejudice.

The parties have the right to seek judicial review of this Order. The Commission and the appropriate District Court of Appeal must receive notice of appeal within 30 days of the date this Order is filed with the Clerk of the Commission. Explanation of the right to appeal is found in Section 120.68, Florida Statutes, and in the Florida Rules of Appellate Procedure 9.110.

DONE AND ORDERED this 13 day of December, 2018.
FOR THE FLORIDA COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS:

Commissioner Tony Jenkins, Panel Chairperson;
Commissioner Mario Garza; and
Commissioner Rebecca Steele

Filed this 13 day of December, 2018,
in Tallahassee, Florida.


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James H. Peterson, III, Administrative Law Judge, DOAH

Sarah Stewart, Legal Advisor for Commission Panel

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a copy of the foregoing has been mailed to the above listed addressees this 13 day of December, 2018.

By: Jammy Barton
Clerk of the Commission
Florida Commission on Human Relations