

216.15 Complaint — hearing.

1. Any person claiming to be aggrieved by a discriminatory or unfair practice may, in person or by an attorney, make, sign, and file with the agency a verified, written complaint, which shall state the name and address of the person, employer, employment agency, or labor organization alleged to have committed the discriminatory or unfair practice of which complained, shall set forth the particulars thereof, and shall contain such other information as may be required by the agency. Agency staff, a commissioner, or the attorney general may in like manner make, sign, and file such complaint.

2. Any place of public accommodation, employer, labor organization, or other person who has any employees or members who refuse or threaten to refuse to comply with the provisions of [this chapter](#) may file with the agency a verified written complaint in triplicate asking the agency for assistance to obtain their compliance by conciliation or other remedial action.

3. a. After the filing of a verified complaint, a true copy shall be served within twenty days on the person against whom the complaint is filed, except as provided in [subsection 4](#). Agency staff shall make a prompt investigation and shall issue a recommendation to an administrative law judge employed by the division of administrative hearings created by [section 10A.801](#), who shall then issue a determination of probable cause or no probable cause.

b. For purposes of [this chapter](#), an administrative law judge issuing a determination of probable cause or no probable cause under [this section](#) is exempt from [section 17A.17](#).

c. If the administrative law judge concurs with the investigating official that probable cause exists regarding the allegations of the complaint, the staff of the agency shall promptly endeavor to eliminate the discriminatory or unfair practice by conference, conciliation, and persuasion. If the administrative law judge finds that no probable cause exists, the administrative law judge shall issue a final order dismissing the complaint and shall promptly mail a copy to the complainant and to the respondent. A finding of probable cause shall not be introduced into evidence in an action brought under [section 216.16](#).

d. The agency staff must endeavor to eliminate the discriminatory or unfair practice by conference, conciliation, and persuasion for a period of thirty days following the initial conciliation meeting between the respondent and the agency staff after a finding of probable cause. After the expiration of thirty days, the director may order the conciliation conference and persuasion procedure provided in [this section](#) to be bypassed when the director determines the procedure is unworkable by reason of past patterns and practices of the respondent, or a statement by the respondent that the respondent is unwilling to continue with the conciliation. Upon the bypassing of conciliation, the director shall state in writing the reasons for bypassing.

4. a. The agency may permit service of a complaint on a respondent by regular or electronic mail. If the respondent does not respond to the service by regular or electronic mail after ninety days, the agency shall serve the complaint on the respondent by certified mail within twenty days after the expiration of the ninety-day response period to service by regular or electronic mail.

b. The agency may also permit a party to file a response to a complaint, a document, information, or other material, by electronic mail.

c. The agency may issue a notice, determination, order, subpoena, request, correspondence, or any other document issued by the agency, by electronic mail.

5. The members of the commission and agency staff shall not disclose the filing of a complaint, the information gathered during the investigation, or the endeavors to eliminate such discriminatory or unfair practice by mediation, conference, conciliation, and persuasion, unless such disclosure is made in connection with the conduct of such investigation.

6. When the director is satisfied that further endeavor to settle a complaint by conference, conciliation, and persuasion is unworkable and should be bypassed, and the thirty-day period provided for in [subsection 3](#) has expired without agreement, the director shall issue and cause to be served a written notice specifying the charges in the complaint as they may have been amended and the reasons for bypassing conciliation, if the conciliation is bypassed, and requiring the respondent to answer the charges of the complaint at a hearing before the agency, a commissioner, or a person designated by the agency to conduct the hearing,

hereafter referred to as the administrative law judge, and at a time and place to be specified in the notice.

7. The case in support of such complaint shall be presented at the hearing by one of the agency's attorneys or agents. The investigating official shall not participate in the hearing except as a witness nor participate in the deliberations of the agency in such case.

8. The hearing shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions of [chapter 17A](#) for contested cases. The burden of proof in such a hearing shall be on the agency.

9. If upon taking into consideration all of the evidence at a hearing the agency determines that the respondent has engaged in a discriminatory or unfair practice, the agency shall state its findings of fact and conclusions of law and shall issue an order requiring the respondent to cease and desist from the discriminatory or unfair practice and to take the necessary remedial action as in the judgment of the agency will carry out the purposes of [this chapter](#). A copy of the order shall be delivered to the respondent, the complainant, and to any other public officers and persons as the agency deems proper.

a. For the purposes of [this subsection](#) and pursuant to the provisions of [this chapter](#) "remedial action" includes but is not limited to the following:

(1) Hiring, reinstatement or upgrading of employees with or without pay. Interim earned income and unemployment compensation shall operate to reduce the pay otherwise allowable.

(2) Admission or restoration of individuals to a labor organization, admission to or participation in a guidance program, apprenticeship training program, on-the-job training program or other occupational training or retraining program, with the utilization of objective criteria in the admission of individuals to such programs.

(3) Admission of individuals to a public accommodation or an educational institution.

(4) Sale, exchange, lease, rental, assignment or sublease of real property to an individual.

(5) Extension to all individuals of the full and equal enjoyment of the advantages, facilities, privileges, and services of the respondent denied to the complainant because of the discriminatory or unfair practice.

(6) Reporting as to the manner of compliance.

(7) Posting notices in conspicuous places in the respondent's place of business in form prescribed by the agency and inclusion of notices in advertising material.

(8) Payment to the complainant of damages for an injury caused by the discriminatory or unfair practice, which damages shall include but are not limited to actual damages, court costs, and reasonable attorney fees.

(9) For an unfair or discriminatory practice relating to wage discrimination pursuant to [section 216.6A](#), payment to the complainant of damages for an injury caused by the discriminatory or unfair practice, which damages shall include but are not limited to court costs, reasonable attorney fees, and either of the following:

(a) An amount equal to two times the wage differential paid to another employee compared to the complainant for the period of time for which the complainant has been discriminated against.

(b) In instances of willful violation, an amount equal to three times the wage differential paid to another employee as compared to the complainant for the period of time for which the complainant has been discriminated against.

b. In addition to the remedies provided in the preceding provisions of [this subsection](#), the agency may issue an order requiring the respondent to cease and desist from the discriminatory or unfair practice and to take such affirmative action as in the judgment of the agency will carry out the purposes of [this chapter](#) as follows:

(1) In the case of a respondent operating by virtue of a license issued by the state or a political subdivision or agency, if the agency, upon notice to the respondent with an opportunity to be heard, determines that the respondent has engaged in a discriminatory or unfair practice and that the practice was authorized, requested, commanded, performed or knowingly or recklessly tolerated by the board of directors of the respondent or by an officer or executive agent acting within the scope of the officer's or agent's employment, the agency shall so certify to the licensing agency. Unless the agency finding of a discriminatory or unfair practice is reversed in the course of judicial review, the finding of discrimination

is binding on the licensing agency. If a certification is made pursuant to [this subsection](#), the licensing agency may initiate licensee disciplinary procedures.

(2) In the case of a respondent who is found by the agency to have engaged in a discriminatory or unfair practice in the course of performing under a contract or subcontract with the state or political subdivision or agency, if the practice was authorized, requested, commanded, performed, or knowingly or recklessly tolerated by the board of directors of the respondent or by an officer or executive agent acting within the scope of the officer's or agent's employment, the agency shall so certify to the contracting agency. Unless the agency's finding of a discriminatory or unfair practice is reversed in the course of judicial review, the finding of discrimination is binding on the contracting agency.

(3) Upon receiving a certification made under [this subsection](#), a contracting agency may take appropriate action to terminate a contract or portion thereof previously entered into with the respondent, either absolutely or on condition that the respondent carry out a program of compliance with the provisions of [this chapter](#); and assist the state and all political subdivisions and agencies thereof to refrain from entering into further contracts.

c. The election of an affirmative order under paragraph "b" of [this subsection](#) shall not bar the election of affirmative remedies provided in paragraph "a" of [this subsection](#).

10. a. The terms of a conciliation or mediation agreement reached with the respondent may require the respondent to refrain in the future from committing discriminatory or unfair practices of the type stated in the agreement, to take remedial action as in the judgment of the agency will carry out the purposes of [this chapter](#), and to consent to the entry in an appropriate district court of a consent decree embodying the terms of the conciliation or mediation agreement. Violation of such a consent decree may be punished as contempt by the court in which it is filed, upon a showing by the agency of the violation at any time within six months of its occurrence. At any time in its discretion, the agency may investigate whether the terms of the agreement are being complied with by the respondent.

b. Upon a finding that the terms of the conciliation or mediation agreement are not being complied with by the respondent, the agency shall take appropriate action to assure compliance.

11. If, upon taking into consideration all of the evidence at a hearing, the agency finds that a respondent has not engaged in any such discriminatory or unfair practice, the agency shall issue an order denying relief and stating the findings of fact and conclusions of the agency, and shall cause a copy of the order dismissing the complaint to be served on the complainant and the respondent.

12. The agency shall establish rules to govern, expedite, and effectuate the procedures established by [this chapter](#) and its own actions thereunder.

13. Except as provided in [section 614.8](#), a claim under [this chapter](#) shall not be maintained unless a complaint is filed with the agency within three hundred days after the alleged discriminatory or unfair practice occurred.

14. The agency or a party to a complaint may request mediation of the complaint at any time during the agency's processing of the complaint. If the complainant and respondent participate in mediation, any mediation agreement may be enforced pursuant to [this section](#). Mediation may be discontinued at the request of any party or the agency.

[C66, 71, §105A.9; C73, §601A.9; C75, 77, §601A.14; C79, 81, §601A.15]

[88 Acts, ch 1109, §27, 28](#)

C93, §216.15

[95 Acts, ch 129, §8 – 11](#); [98 Acts, ch 1202, §36, 46](#); [2005 Acts, ch 23, §1 – 3](#); [2007 Acts, ch 110, §1](#); [2008 Acts, ch 1028, §1](#); [2009 Acts, ch 96, §3](#); [2009 Acts, ch 178, §25, 26](#); [2023 Acts, ch 19, §1715](#); [2024 Acts, ch 1170, §260](#); [2025 Acts, ch 30, §39 – 42](#)

Referred to in [§216.15A](#), [216.16](#), [216.16A](#), [216.17](#)

Subsection 1 amended

Subsection 9, unnumbered paragraph 1 amended

Subsection 9, paragraph a, subparagraph (8) amended

Subsection 9, paragraph a, subparagraph (9), unnumbered paragraph 1 amended