

Step B update



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The original intent of the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) was for each Step B Dispute Resolution Team (DRT) to use the *Joint Contract Administration Manual* (JCAM) to issue decisions within 14 days of receiving grievances from Formal Step A. The idea was that a Step B decision would give the local parties direction in resolving future disputes involving the same situation. Then the local parties would resolve a higher percentage of their own grievances and reduce the number of Step B teams needed to issue timely decisions.

As a group, we are getting further and further away from this goal. There are still plenty of places around the country where the DRP works as intended and the vast majority of grievances are resolved at the local level. But there are some places that did not “get the memo” about the original intent of this process. In those USPS districts, there is a backlog of cases pending a decision at Step B.

Before I explain the current backlog, consider this: It has been true for many years that 75 percent or more of the grievances that are appealed to Step B are resolved at that step. In the last year, 78 percent of the grievances that were appealed to Step B were resolved at that level (which tells you that nothing has changed nationwide in that regard). Additionally, 60 percent to 70 percent of the grievances imposed by the Step B teams were resolved through pre-arbitration discussions. Those percentages have been consistent since we started the arbitration-scheduling pilot tests in 2015. It follows that these facts should translate into more grievances being resolved at the local level.

In some circles, it does not work this way. To me, this is a puzzle that could be solved if both parties had a will to do something about it. I am hoping that the task force created by the Memorandum of Understanding Re: Article 15 – Dispute Resolution Procedure Task Force in the 2016-2019 National Agreement will produce such a result. I can report that we are actively meeting and discussing possible solutions to the cause of the backlogs.

As of this writing, we still have 58 full-time Step B teams that serve the 67 USPS districts around the country. This number hasn’t changed in nearly a decade. That shows the lack of progress in achieving the original intent of the DRP.

Management has recently changed the structure on their side of the Step B representative selection/reporting pro-

cess. They posted 78 full-time Step B representative jobs around the country. Those folks who are selected will report to the USPS area as opposed to the USPS district. In theory, this should make these players have broader authority to make decisions. We shall see.

Here is where we stand now: There are currently 4,278 cases pending a decision at Step B. Of those, 2,680 grievances have been at Step B awaiting a decision for more than 14 days. Last year at this time, we had 2,098 cases pending a decision at Step B with 768 grievances that had been at Step B awaiting a decision for over 14 days.

A total of 2,633 of the 4,278 cases currently pending a decision at Step B and 2,114 of the 2,680 grievances that have been at Step B awaiting a decision for more than 14 days come from just 10 of the 67 USPS districts. Another way to say it is 60 percent of the grievances and 80 percent of the backlogged cases come from these 10 USPS districts.

These 10 USPS districts have a long-term problem with backlogs. The common thread is that the DRTs are productive but receive more cases from Formal Step A than they can handle in a timely fashion. The result is that grievances from these areas often get sent to other DRTs for a Step B decision that causes more delays and, in some cases, inconsistent decisions. This, in turn, causes more cases to be appealed to Step B from Formal Step A, thereby creating a never-ending cycle of backlogs at Step B.

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The first order of business is to activate enough Step B teams from outside the problematic USPS districts to get the backlogs cleared. I have been trying to convince USPS to do this for at least six months. I believe we will finally see some movement on this in the near future and I hope to be able to report some positive results by the time we have our convention.

Finding our way back to doing the things that promote and encourage the parties at every step of the DRP to make a real attempt to resolve their grievances themselves, instead of passing them on to someone else, is the key to solving our puzzle in the problem USPS districts.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the national convention.