

National Transit Systems Security Act (NTSSA)
6 U.S.C. §1142

§1412. Public transportation employee protections.

(a) **IN GENERAL.** - A public transportation agency, a contractor or a subcontractor of such agency, or an officer or employee of such agency, shall not discharge, demote, suspend, reprimand, or in any other way discriminate against an employee if such discrimination is due, in whole or in part, to the employee's lawful, good faith act done, or perceived by the employer to have been done or about to be done -

(1) to provide information, directly cause information to be provided, or otherwise directly assist in any investigation regarding any conduct which the employee reasonably believes constitutes a violation of any Federal law, rule, or regulation relating to public transportation safety or security, or fraud, waste, or abuse of Federal grants or other public funds intended to be used for public transportation safety or security, if the information or assistance is provided to or an investigation stemming from the provided information is conducted by -

(A) a Federal, State, or local regulatory or law enforcement agency (including an office of the Inspector General under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.; Public Law 95-452);

(B) any Member of Congress, any Committee of Congress, or the Government Accountability Office; or

(C) a person with supervisory authority over the employee or such other person who has the authority to investigate, discover, or terminate the misconduct;

(2) to refuse to violate or assist in the violation of any Federal law, rule, or regulation relating to public transportation safety or security;

(3) to file a complaint or directly cause to be brought a proceeding related to the enforcement of this section or to testify in that proceeding;

(4) to cooperate with a safety or security investigation by the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or the National Transportation Safety Board; or

(5) to furnish information to the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the National Transportation Safety Board, or any Federal, State, or local regulatory or law enforcement agency as to the facts relating to any accident or incident resulting in injury or death to an individual or damage to property occurring in connection with public transportation.

(b) **HAZARDOUS SAFETY OR SECURITY CONDITIONS.** - (1) A public transportation agency, or a contractor or a subcontractor of such agency, or an officer or employee of such agency, shall not discharge, demote, suspend, reprimand, or in any other way discriminate against an employee for -

(A) reporting a hazardous safety or security condition;

(B) refusing to work when confronted by a hazardous safety or security condition related to the performance of the employee's duties, if the conditions described in paragraph (2) exist; or

(C) refusing to authorize the use of any safety- or security-related equipment, track, or structures, if the employee is responsible for the inspection or repair of the equipment, track, or structures, when the employee believes that the equipment, track, or structures are in a hazardous safety or security condition, if the conditions described in paragraph (2) of this subsection exist.

(2) A refusal is protected under paragraph (1)(B) and (C) if -

(A) the refusal is made in good faith and no reasonable alternative to the refusal is available to the employee;

(B) a reasonable individual in the circumstances then confronting the employee would conclude that -

(i) the hazardous condition presents an imminent danger of death or serious injury; and

(ii) the urgency of the situation does not allow sufficient time to eliminate the danger without such refusal; and

(C) the employee, where possible, has notified the public transportation agency of the existence of the hazardous condition and the intention not to perform further work, or not to authorize the use of the hazardous equipment, track, or structures, unless the condition is corrected immediately or the equipment, track, or structures are repaired properly or replaced.

(3) In this subsection, only subsection (b)(1)(A) shall apply to security personnel, including transit police, employed or utilized by a public transportation agency to protect riders, equipment, assets, or facilities.

(c) ENFORCEMENT ACTION. -

(1) FILING AND NOTIFICATION. - A person who believes that he or she has been discharged or otherwise discriminated against by any person in violation of subsection (a) or (b) may, not later than 180 days after the date on which such violation occurs, file (or have any person file on his or her behalf) a complaint with the Secretary of Labor alleging such discharge or discrimination. Upon receipt of a complaint filed under this paragraph, the Secretary of Labor shall notify, in writing, the person named in the complaint and the person's employer of the filing of the complaint, of the allegations contained in the complaint, of the substance of evidence supporting the complaint, and of the opportunities that will be afforded to such person under paragraph (2).

(2) INVESTIGATION; PRELIMINARY ORDER. -

(A) IN GENERAL. - Not later than 60 days after the date of receipt of a complaint filed under paragraph (1) and after affording the person named in the complaint an opportunity to submit to the Secretary of Labor a written response to the complaint and an opportunity to meet with a representative of the Secretary of Labor to present statements from witnesses, the Secretary of Labor shall conduct an investigation and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the complaint has merit and notify, in writing, the complainant and the person alleged to have committed a violation of subsection (a) or (b) of the Secretary of Labor's findings. If the Secretary of Labor concludes that there is a reasonable cause to believe that a violation of subsection (a) or (b) has occurred, the Secretary of Labor shall accompany the Secretary of Labor's findings with a preliminary order providing the relief prescribed by paragraph (3)(B). Not later than 30 days after the date of notification of findings under this paragraph, either the person alleged to have committed the violation or the complainant may file objections to the findings or preliminary order, or both, and request a hearing on the record. The filing of such objections shall not operate to stay any reinstatement remedy contained in the preliminary order. Such hearings shall be conducted expeditiously. If a hearing is not requested in such 30-day period, the preliminary order shall be deemed a final order that is not subject to judicial review.

(B) REQUIREMENTS. -

(i) REQUIRED SHOWING BY COMPLAINANT. - The Secretary of Labor shall dismiss a complaint filed under this subsection and shall not conduct an investigation otherwise required under subparagraph (A) unless the complainant makes a prima facie showing that any behavior described in subsection (a) or (b) was a contributing factor in the unfavorable personnel action alleged in the complaint.

(ii) SHOWING BY EMPLOYER.—Notwithstanding a finding by the Secretary of Labor that the complainant has made the showing required under clause (i), no investigation otherwise required under paragraph (A) shall be conducted if the employer demonstrates, by clear and convincing evidence, that the employer would have taken the same unfavorable personnel action in the absence of that behavior.

(iii) CRITERIA FOR DETERMINATION BY SECRETARY OF LABOR. - The Secretary of Labor may determine that a violation of subsection (a) or (b) has occurred only if the complainant demonstrates that any behavior described in subsection (a) or (b) was a contributing factor in the unfavorable personnel action alleged in the complaint.

(iv) PROHIBITION. - Relief may not be ordered under paragraph (A) if the employer demonstrates by clear and convincing evidence that the employer would have taken the same unfavorable personnel action in the absence of that behavior.

(3) FINAL ORDER. -

(A) DEADLINE FOR ISSUANCE; SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS. - Not later than 120 days after the date of conclusion of a hearing under paragraph (2), the Secretary of Labor shall issue a final order providing the relief prescribed by this paragraph or denying the complaint. At any time before issuance of a final order, a proceeding under this subsection may be terminated on the basis of a settlement agreement entered into by the Secretary of Labor, the complainant, and the person alleged to have committed the violation.

(B) REMEDY. - If, in response to a complaint filed under paragraph (1), the Secretary of Labor determines that a violation of subsection (a) or (b) has occurred, the Secretary of Labor shall order the person who committed such violation to -

(i) take affirmative action to abate the violation; and

(ii) provide the remedies described in subsection (d).

(C) ORDER. - If an order is issued under subparagraph (B), the Secretary of Labor, at the request of the complainant, shall assess against the person against whom the order is issued a sum equal to the aggregate amount of all costs and expenses (including attorney and expert witness fees) reasonably incurred, as determined by the Secretary of Labor, by the complainant for, or in connection with, bringing the complaint upon which the order was issued.

(D) FRIVOLOUS COMPLAINTS. - If the Secretary of Labor finds that a complaint under paragraph (1) is frivolous or has been brought in bad faith, the Secretary of Labor may award to the prevailing employer reasonable attorney fees not exceeding \$1,000.

(4) REVIEW. -

(A) APPEAL TO COURT OF APPEALS. - Any person adversely affected or aggrieved by an order issued under paragraph (3) may obtain review of the order in the United States Court of Appeals for the circuit in which the violation, with respect to which the order was issued, allegedly occurred or the circuit in which the complainant resided on the date of such violation. The petition for review must be filed not later than 60 days after the date of the issuance of the final order of the Secretary of Labor. Review shall conform to chapter 7 of title 5, United States Code. The commencement of proceedings under this subparagraph shall not, unless ordered by the court, operate as a stay of the order.

(B) LIMITATION ON COLLATERAL ATTACK.—An order of the Secretary of Labor with respect to which review could have been obtained under subparagraph (A) shall not be subject to judicial review in any criminal or other civil proceeding.

(5) ENFORCEMENT OF ORDER BY SECRETARY OF LABOR. - Whenever any person has failed to comply with an order issued under paragraph (3), the Secretary of Labor may file a civil action in the United States district court for the district in which the violation was found to occur to enforce such order. In actions brought under this paragraph, the district courts shall have jurisdiction to grant all appropriate relief including, but not limited to, injunctive relief and compensatory damages.

(6) ENFORCEMENT OF ORDER BY PARTIES. -

(A) COMMENCEMENT OF ACTION. - A person on whose behalf an order was issued under paragraph (3) may commence a civil action against the person to whom such order was issued to require compliance with such order. The appropriate United States district court shall have jurisdiction, without regard to the amount in controversy or the citizenship of the parties, to enforce such order.

(B) ATTORNEY FEES. - The court, in issuing any final order under this paragraph, may award costs of litigation (including reasonable attorney and expert witness fees) to any party whenever the court determines such award is appropriate.

(7) DE NOVO REVIEW. - With respect to a complaint under paragraph (1), if the Secretary of Labor has not issued a final decision within 210 days after the filing of the complaint and if the delay is not due to the bad faith of the employee, the employee may bring an original action at law or equity for de novo review in the appropriate district court of the United States, which shall have jurisdiction over such an action without regard to the amount in controversy, and which action shall, at the request of either party to such action, be tried by the court with a jury. The action shall be governed by the same legal burdens of proof specified in paragraph (2)(B) for review by the Secretary of Labor.

(d) REMEDIES. -

(1) IN GENERAL. - An employee prevailing in any action under subsection (c) shall be entitled to all relief necessary to make the employee whole.

(2) DAMAGES. - Relief in an action under subsection (c) (including an action described in (c)(7)) shall include -
(A) reinstatement with the same seniority status that the employee would have had, but for the discrimination;

(B) any backpay, with interest; and

(C) compensatory damages, including compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the discrimination, including litigation costs, expert witness fees, and reasonable attorney fees.

(3) POSSIBLE RELIEF. - Relief in any action under subsection (c) may include punitive damages in an amount not to exceed \$250,000.

(e) ELECTION OF REMEDIES. - An employee may not seek protection under both this section and another provision of law for the same allegedly unlawful act of the public transportation agency.

(f) NO PREEMPTION. - Nothing in this section preempts or diminishes any other safeguards against discrimination, demotion, discharge, suspension, threats, harassment, reprimand, retaliation, or any other manner of discrimination provided by Federal or State law.

(g) RIGHTS RETAINED BY EMPLOYEE. - Nothing in this section shall be construed to diminish the rights, privileges, or remedies of any employee under any Federal or State law or under any collective bargaining agreement. The rights and remedies in this section may not be waived by any agreement, policy, form, or condition of employment.

(h) DISCLOSURE OF IDENTITY. -

(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, or with the written consent of the employee, the Secretary of Transportation or the Secretary of Homeland Security may not disclose the name of an employee who has provided information described in subsection (a)(1).

(2) The Secretary of Transportation or the Secretary of Homeland Security shall disclose to the Attorney General the name of an employee described in paragraph (1) of this subsection if the matter is referred to the Attorney General for enforcement. The Secretary making such disclosure shall provide reasonable advance notice to the affected employee if disclosure of that person's identity or identifying information is to occur.

(i) PROCESS FOR REPORTING SECURITY PROBLEMS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY. -

(1) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROCESS. - The Secretary shall establish through regulations after an opportunity for notice and comment, and provide information to the public regarding, a process by which any person may submit a report to the Secretary regarding public transportation security problems, deficiencies, or vulnerabilities.

(2) ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT. - If a report submitted under paragraph (1) identifies the person making the report, the Secretary shall respond promptly to such person and acknowledge receipt of the report.

(3) STEPS TO ADDRESS PROBLEM. - The Secretary shall review and consider the information provided in any report submitted under paragraph (1) and shall take appropriate steps to address any problems or deficiencies identified.