

## [49 USCS § 30171](#)

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### **§ 30171. Protection of employees providing motor vehicle safety information**

- (a) Discrimination against employees of manufacturers, part suppliers, and dealerships. No motor vehicle manufacturer, part supplier, or dealership may discharge an employee or otherwise discriminate against an employee with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because the employee (or any person acting pursuant to a request of the employee)--
- (1) provided, caused to be provided, or is about to provide (with any knowledge of the employer) or cause to be provided to the employer or the Secretary of Transportation information relating to any motor vehicle defect, noncompliance, or any violation or alleged violation of any notification or reporting requirement of this chapter [[49 USCS §§ 30101](#) et seq.];
  - (2) has filed, caused to be filed, or is about to file (with any knowledge of the employer) or cause to be filed a proceeding relating to any violation or alleged violation of any motor vehicle defect, noncompliance, or any violation or alleged violation of any notification or reporting requirement of this chapter [[49 USCS §§ 30101](#) et seq.];
  - (3) testified or is about to testify in such a proceeding;
  - (4) assisted or participated or is about to assist or participate in such a proceeding; or
  - (5) objected to, or refused to participate in, any activity that the employee reasonably believed to be in violation of any provision of chapter 301 of this title [[USCS §§ 30101](#) et seq.], or any order, rule, regulation, standard, or ban under such provision.
- (b) Complaint procedure.
- (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) may file (or have any person file on his or her behalf), not later than 180 days after the date on which such violation occurs, a complaint with the Secretary of Labor (hereinafter in this section referred to as the "Secretary") alleging such discharge or discrimination. Upon receipt of such a complaint, the Secretary shall notify, in writing, the person named in the complaint 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 a written response to the complaint and an opportunity to meet with a representative of the Secretary to present statements from witnesses, the Secretary 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) of the Secretary's findings. If the Secretary concludes that there is a reasonable cause to believe that a violation of subsection (a) has occurred, the Secretary shall accompany the Secretary'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 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 paragraphs (1) through (5) of subsection (a) was a contributing factor in the unfavorable personnel action alleged in the complaint.
- (ii)** Showing by employer. Notwithstanding a finding by the Secretary that the complainant has made the showing required under clause (i), no investigation otherwise required under subparagraph (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. The Secretary may determine that a violation of subsection (a) has occurred only if the complainant demonstrates that any behavior described in paragraphs (1) through (5) of subsection (a) was a contributing factor in the unfavorable personnel action alleged in the complaint.
- (iv)** Prohibition. Relief may not be ordered under subparagraph (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 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, 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 determines that a violation of subsection (a) has occurred, the Secretary shall order the person who committed such violation--
  - (i)** to take affirmative action to abate the violation;
  - (ii)** to reinstate the complainant to his or her former position together with the compensation (including back pay) and restore the terms, conditions, and privileges associated with his or her employment; and
  - (iii)** to provide compensatory damages to the complainant.
- (C)** Attorneys' fees. If such an order is issued under this paragraph, the Secretary, 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 attorneys' and expert witness fees) reasonably incurred, as determined by the Secretary, by the complainant for, or in connection with, bringing the complaint upon which the order was issued.
- (D)** Frivolous complaints. If the Secretary determines that a complaint under paragraph (1) is frivolous or has been brought in bad faith, the Secretary may award to the prevailing employer a reasonable attorney's fee not exceeding \$ 1,000.
- (E)** De novo review. With respect to a complaint under paragraph (1), if the Secretary 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 the 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.

(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 shall be filed not later than 60 days after the date of the issuance of the final order of the Secretary. Review shall conform to chapter 7 of title 5 [*5 USCS §§ 701* et seq.]. 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 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. Whenever any person fails to comply with an order issued under paragraph (3), the Secretary 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 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.

(c) Mandamus. Any nondiscretionary duty imposed under this section shall be enforceable in a mandamus proceeding brought under section 1361 of title 28.

(d) Nonapplicability to deliberate violations. Subsection (a) shall not apply with respect to an employee of a motor vehicle manufacturer, part supplier, or dealership who, acting without direction from such motor vehicle manufacturer, part supplier, or dealership (or such person's agent), deliberately causes a violation of any requirement relating to motor vehicle safety under this chapter [*49 USCS §§ 30101* et seq.].

## History

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(Added July 6, 2012, *P.L. 112-141*, Div C, Title I, Subtitle C, § 31307(a), *126 Stat. 765*.)

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