

assign a judge to each case or class of cases. A judge shall be disqualified in any case in which the judge has a substantial interest, has been of counsel, is or has been a material witness, or is so related to or connected with any party or the party's attorney as to make it improper for the judge to be assigned to the case.

**(e) Review and evidentiary functions**

The judge shall review and may require that evidence be taken on the sufficiency of the preliminary departmental determination as set forth in section 1234a of this title.

**(f) Conduct of proceedings; costs and fees of parties**

(1) The proceedings of the Office shall be conducted according to such rules as the Secretary shall prescribe by regulation in conformance with the rules relating to hearings in title 5, sections 554, 556, and 557.

(2) The provisions of title 5, section 504, relating to costs and fees of parties, shall apply to the proceedings before the Department.

**(g) Discovery; scope, time, etc.; issue and enforcement of subpoenas**

(1) In order to secure a fair, expeditious, and economical resolution of cases and where the judge determines that the discovered information is likely to elicit relevant information with respect to an issue in the case, is not sought primarily for the purposes of delay or harassment, and would serve the ends of justice, the judge may order a party to—

- (A) produce relevant documents;
- (B) answer written interrogatories that inquire into relevant matters; and
- (C) have depositions taken.

The judge shall set a time limit of 90 days on the discovery period. The judge may extend this period for good cause shown. At the request of any party, the judge may establish a specific schedule for the conduct of discovery.

(2) In order to carry out the provisions of subsections (f)(1) and (g)(1), the judge is authorized to issue subpoenas and apply to the appropriate court of the United States for enforcement of a subpoena. The court may enforce the subpoena as if it pertained to a proceeding before that court.

**(h) Mediation of disputes**

The Secretary shall establish a process for the voluntary mediation of disputes pending before the Office. The mediator shall be agreed to by all parties involved in mediation and shall be independent of the parties to the dispute. In the mediation of disputes the Secretary shall consider mitigating circumstances and proportion of harm pursuant to section 1234b of this title. In accordance with rule 408 of the Federal Rules of Evidence, evidence of conduct or statements made in compromise negotiations shall not be admissible in proceedings before the Office. Mediation shall be limited to 120 days, except that the mediator may grant extensions of such period.

**(i) Professional personnel; employment, assignment, or transfer**

The Secretary shall employ, assign, or transfer sufficient professional personnel, including

judges of the Office, to ensure that all matters brought before the Office may be dealt with in a timely manner.

(Pub. L. 90-247, title IV, § 451, as added Pub. L. 95-561, title XII, § 1232, Nov. 1, 1978, 92 Stat. 2346; amended Pub. L. 100-297, title III, § 3501(a), Apr. 28, 1988, 102 Stat. 349.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

The Federal Rules of Evidence, referred to in subsec. (h), are set out in the Appendix to Title 28, Judiciary and Judicial Procedure.

AMENDMENTS

1988—Pub. L. 100-297 amended section generally, substituting provisions relating to Office of Administrative Law Judges for provisions relating to Education Appeal Board.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1988 AMENDMENT

Pub. L. 100-297, title III, § 3501(b), Apr. 28, 1988, 102 Stat. 357, provided that:

“(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), the amendments made by this section [enacting sections 1234f to 1234i of this title and amending this section and sections 1232d and 1234a to 1234e of this title] shall be effective 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act [Apr. 28, 1988].

“(2) The amendments made by this part [part D (§ 3501) of title III of Pub. L. 100-297, enacting sections 1234f to 1234i of this title and amending this section and sections 1232d and 1234a to 1234e of this title] shall not apply to any case in which the recipient, prior to the effective date of this part, received a written notice that such recipient must return funds to the Department.”

EFFECTIVE DATE

Subchapter effective 120 days after Nov. 1, 1978, see section 1261 of Pub. L. 95-561, set out as a note under section 1232c of this title.

**§ 1234a. Recovery of funds**

**(a) Preliminary departmental decision; grounds of determination; notice requirements; prima facie case; amount of funds recoverable**

(1) Whenever the Secretary determines that a recipient of a grant or cooperative agreement under an applicable program must return funds because the recipient has made an expenditure of funds that is not allowable under that grant or cooperative agreement, or has otherwise failed to discharge its obligation to account properly for funds under the grant or cooperative agreement, the Secretary shall give the recipient written notice of a preliminary departmental decision and notify the recipient of its right to have that decision reviewed by the Office and of its right to request mediation.

(2) In a preliminary departmental decision, the Secretary shall have the burden of establishing a prima facie case for the recovery of funds, including an analysis reflecting the value of the program services actually obtained in a determination of harm to the Federal interest. The facts to serve as the basis of the preliminary departmental decision may come from an audit report, an investigative report, a monitoring report, or other evidence. The amount of funds to be recovered shall be determined on the basis of section 1234b of this title.

(3) For the purpose of paragraph (2), failure by a recipient to maintain records required by law,

or to allow the Secretary access to such records, shall constitute a prima facie case.

**(b) Review of preliminary departmental decision; form and contents of application for review; inadequate preliminary decisions; duties of recipient to subrecipients after preliminary decision; burden of proof**

(1) A recipient that has received written notice of a preliminary departmental decision and that desires to have such decision reviewed by the Office shall submit to the Office an application for review not later than 60 days after receipt of notice of the preliminary departmental decision. The application shall be in the form and contain the information specified by the Office. As expeditiously as possible, the Office shall return to the Secretary for such action as the Secretary considers appropriate any preliminary departmental decision which the Office determines does not meet the requirements of subsection (a)(2).

(2) In cases where the preliminary departmental decision requests a recovery of funds from a State recipient, that State recipient may not recover funds from an affected local educational agency unless that State recipient has—

(A) transmitted a copy of the preliminary departmental decision to any affected subrecipient within 10 days of the date that the State recipient in a State administered program received such written notice; and

(B) consulted with each affected subrecipient to determine whether the State recipient should submit an application for review under paragraph (1).

(3) In any proceeding before the Office under this section, the burden shall be upon the recipient to demonstrate that it should not be required to return the amount of funds for which recovery is sought in the preliminary departmental decision under subsection (a).

**(c) Time for hearing**

A hearing shall be set 90 days after receipt of a request for review of a preliminary departmental decision by the Office, except that such 90-day requirement may be waived at the discretion of the judge for good cause.

**(d) Review of findings of fact in preliminary decision; conclusiveness; remand; new or modified findings**

(1) Upon review of a decision of the Office by the Secretary, the findings of fact by the Office, if supported by substantial evidence, shall be conclusive. However, the Secretary, for good cause shown, may remand the case to the Office to take further evidence, and the Office may thereupon make new or modified findings of fact and may modify its previous action. Such new or modified findings of fact shall likewise be conclusive if supported by substantial evidence.

(2) During the conduct of such review, there shall not be any ex parte contact between the Secretary and individuals representing the Department or the recipient.

**(e) Time for filing petition for review of preliminary decision**

Parties to the proceeding shall have 30 days to file a petition for review of a decision of the ad-

ministrative law judges with the Office of the Secretary.

**(f) Stay of collection or other adverse action by Secretary against recipient**

(1) If a recipient submits a timely application for review of a preliminary departmental decision, the Secretary shall take no collection action until the decision of the Office upholding the preliminary Department decision in whole or in part becomes final agency action under subsection (g).

(2) If a recipient files a timely petition for judicial review under section 1234g of this title, the Secretary shall take no collection action until judicial review is completed.

(3) The filing of an application for review under paragraph (1) or a petition for judicial review under paragraph (2) shall not affect the authority of the Secretary to take any other adverse action under this subchapter against the recipient.

**(g) Preliminary decision as final agency action**

A decision of the Office regarding the review of a preliminary departmental decision shall become final agency action 60 days after the recipient receives written notice of the decision unless the Secretary either—

(1) modifies or sets aside the decision, in whole or in part, in which case the decision of the Secretary shall become final agency action when the recipient receives written notice of the Secretary's action, or

(2) remands the decision to the Office.

**(h) Publication of decisions as final agency actions**

The Secretary shall publish decisions that have become final agency action under subsection (g) in the Federal Register or in another appropriate publication within 60 days.

**(i) Collection amounts and procedures**

The amount of a preliminary departmental decision under subsection (a) for which review has not been requested in accordance with subsection (b), and the amount sustained by a decision of the Office or the Secretary which becomes final agency action under subsection (g), may be collected by the Secretary in accordance with chapter 37 of title 31.

**(j) Compromise of preliminary departmental decisions; preconditions; notice requirements**

(1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary may, subject to the notice requirements of paragraph (2), compromise any preliminary departmental decision under this section which does not exceed the amount agreed to be returned by more than \$200,000, if the Secretary determines that (A) the collection of any or all or the amount thereof would not be practical or in the public interest, and (B) the practice which resulted in the preliminary departmental decision has been corrected and will not recur.

(2) Not less than 45 days prior to the exercise of the authority to compromise a preliminary departmental decision pursuant to paragraph (1), the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register a notice of intention to do so. The notice shall provide interested persons an oppor-

tunity to comment on any proposed action under this subsection through the submission of written data, views, or arguments.

**(k) Limitation period respecting return of funds**

No recipient under an applicable program shall be liable to return funds which were expended in a manner not authorized by law more than 5 years before the recipient received written notice of a preliminary departmental decision.

**(l) Foregoing of interest during period of administrative review**

No interest shall be charged arising from a claim during the administrative review of the preliminary departmental decision.

(Pub. L. 90-247, title IV, §452, as added Pub. L. 95-561, title XII, §1232, Nov. 1, 1978, 92 Stat. 2347; amended Pub. L. 100-297, title III, §3501(a), Apr. 28, 1988, 102 Stat. 350; Pub. L. 103-382, title II, §250(a), Oct. 20, 1994, 108 Stat. 3926.)

AMENDMENTS

1994—Subsec. (a)(2). Pub. L. 103-382, §250(a)(1), substituted “establishing a prima facie case for the recovery of funds, including an analysis reflecting the value of the program services actually obtained in a determination of harm to the Federal interest.” for “stating a prima facie case for the recovery of funds.”

Subsec. (b)(1). Pub. L. 103-382, §250(a)(2), substituted “60 days” for “30 days”.

Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 103-382, §250(a)(3), designated existing provisions as par. (1) and added par. (2).

1988—Pub. L. 100-297 amended section generally, substituting provisions relating to recovery of funds for provisions relating to audit determinations.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1988 AMENDMENT

Amendment by Pub. L. 100-297 effective 180 days after Apr. 28, 1988, but not applicable to recipients receiving written notice to return funds prior to that date, see section 3501(b) of Pub. L. 100-297, set out as a note under section 1234 of this title.

**§ 1234b. Measure of recovery**

**(a) Amount returned proportionate to extent of harm violation caused to an identifiable Federal interest; reduction; determination of identifiable Federal interest**

(1) A recipient determined to have made an unallowable expenditure, or to have otherwise failed to discharge its responsibility to account properly for funds, shall be required to return funds in an amount that is proportionate to the extent of the harm its violation caused to an identifiable Federal interest associated with the program under which the recipient received the award. Such amount shall be reduced in whole or in part by an amount that is proportionate to the extent the mitigating circumstances caused the violation.

(2) For the purpose of paragraph (1), an identifiable Federal interest includes, but is not limited to, serving only eligible beneficiaries; providing only authorized services or benefits; complying with expenditure requirements and conditions (such as set-aside, excess cost, maintenance of effort, comparability, supplement-not-supplant, and matching requirements); preserving the integrity of planning, application, recordkeeping, and reporting requirements; and maintaining accountability for the use of funds.

**(b) Reduction or waiver of amount based on mitigating circumstances; burden of proof; determination of mitigating circumstances; weight, etc., of written request for guidance**

(1) When a State or local educational agency is determined to have made an unallowable expenditure, or to have otherwise failed to discharge its responsibility to account properly for funds, and mitigating circumstances exist, as described in paragraph (2), the judge shall reduce such amount by an amount that is proportionate to the extent the mitigating circumstances caused the violation. Furthermore, the judge is authorized to determine that no recovery is justified when mitigating circumstances warrant. The burden of demonstrating the existence of mitigating circumstances shall be upon the State or local educational agency.

(2) For the purpose of paragraph (1), mitigating circumstances exist only when it would be unjust to compel the recovery of funds because the State or local educational agency—

(A) actually and reasonably relied upon erroneous written guidance provided by the Department;

(B) made an expenditure or engaged in a practice after—

(i) the State or local educational agency submitted to the Secretary, in good faith, a written request for guidance with respect to the expenditure or practice at issue, and

(ii) a Department official did not respond within 90 days of receipt by the Department of such request; or

(C) actually and reasonably relied upon a judicial decree issued to the recipient.

(3) A written request for guidance as described in paragraph (2) sent by certified mail (return receipt requested) shall be conclusive proof of receipt by the Department.

(4) If the Secretary responds to a written request for guidance described in paragraph (2)(B) more than 90 days after its receipt, the State or local educational agency that submitted the request shall comply with the guidance received at the earliest practicable time.

(5) In order to demonstrate the existence of the mitigating circumstances described in paragraph (2)(B), the State or local educational agency shall demonstrate that—

(A) the written request for guidance accurately described the proposed expenditure or practice and included the facts necessary for a determination of its legality; and

(B) the written request for guidance contained a certification by the chief legal officer of the State educational agency that such officer had examined the proposed expenditure or practice and believed the proposed expenditure or practice was permissible under then applicable State and Federal law; and

(C) the State or local educational agency reasonably believed that the proposed expenditure or practice was permissible under then applicable State and Federal law.

(6) The Secretary shall disseminate to State educational agencies responses to written requests for guidance, described in paragraph (5), that reflect significant interpretations of applicable law or policy.