

## AMENDMENTS

2017—Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 115-91, § 1097(c)(2)(A), substituted “45 days” for “15 days”.

Subsec. (e)(1). Pub. L. 115-91, § 1097(c)(2)(B)(i), substituted “Any report required under subsection (c) or paragraph (5) of this subsection” for “Any such report”.

Subsec. (e)(2). Pub. L. 115-91, § 1097(c)(2)(B)(ii), added par. (2) and struck out former par. (2) which related to review of any report of the head of an agency required under subsection (c).

Subsec. (e)(3). Pub. L. 115-91, § 1097(c)(2)(B)(iii), substituted “report submitted to the Special Counsel by the head of an agency under subsection (c) or paragraph (5) of this subsection” for “agency report received pursuant to subsection (c) of this section”.

Subsec. (e)(5). Pub. L. 115-91, § 1097(c)(2)(B)(iv), added par. (5).

2002—Subsec. (g)(1). Pub. L. 107-304, § 3(1), struck out at end “If the Special Counsel does not transmit the information to the head of the agency, the Special Counsel shall return any documents and other matter provided by the individual who made the disclosure.”

Subsec. (g)(3). Pub. L. 107-304, § 3(2), added par. (3) and struck out former par. (3) which read as follows: “If the Special Counsel does not transmit the information to the head of the agency under paragraph (2), the Special Counsel shall—

“(A) return any documents and other matter provided by the individual who made the disclosure; and  
“(B) inform the individual of—

“(i) the reasons why the disclosure may not be further acted on under this chapter; and

“(ii) other offices available for receiving disclosures, should the individual wish to pursue the matter further.”

1996—Subsec. (e)(3). Pub. L. 104-316, § 103(a)(1), substituted “President and” for “President,” and struck out “, and the Comptroller General” before period at end.

Subsec. (e)(4). Pub. L. 104-316, § 103(a)(2), substituted “President and” for “President,” and struck out “, and the Comptroller General” before “together with a”.

#### § 1214. Investigation of prohibited personnel practices; corrective action

(a)(1)(A) The Special Counsel shall receive any allegation of a prohibited personnel practice and shall investigate the allegation to the extent necessary to determine whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that a prohibited personnel practice has occurred, exists, or is to be taken.

(B) Within 15 days after the date of receiving an allegation of a prohibited personnel practice under paragraph (1), the Special Counsel shall provide written notice to the person who made the allegation that—

(i) the allegation has been received by the Special Counsel; and

(ii) shall include the name of a person at the Office of Special Counsel who shall serve as a contact with the person making the allegation.

(C) Unless an investigation is terminated under paragraph (2), the Special Counsel shall—

(i) within 90 days after notice is provided under subparagraph (B), notify the person who made the allegation of the status of the investigation and any action taken by the Office of the Special Counsel since the filing of the allegation;

(ii) notify such person of the status of the investigation and any action taken by the Office of the Special Counsel since the last notice, at

least every 60 days after notice is given under clause (i); and

(iii) notify such person of the status of the investigation and any action taken by the Special Counsel at such time as determined appropriate by the Special Counsel.

(D) No later than 10 days before the Special Counsel terminates any investigation of a prohibited personnel practice, the Special Counsel shall provide a written status report to the person who made the allegation of the proposed findings of fact and legal conclusions. The person may submit written comments about the report to the Special Counsel. The Special Counsel shall not be required to provide a subsequent written status report under this subparagraph after the submission of such written comments.

(2)(A) If the Special Counsel terminates any investigation under paragraph (1), the Special Counsel shall prepare and transmit to any person on whose allegation the investigation was initiated a written statement notifying the person of—

(i) the termination of the investigation;

(ii) a summary of relevant facts ascertained by the Special Counsel, including the facts that support, and the facts that do not support, the allegations of such person;

(iii) the reasons for terminating the investigation; and

(iv) a response to any comments submitted under paragraph (1)(D).

(B) A written statement under subparagraph (A) may not be admissible as evidence in any judicial or administrative proceeding, without the consent of the person who received such statement under subparagraph (A).

(3) Except in a case in which an employee, former employee, or applicant for employment has the right to appeal directly to the Merit Systems Protection Board under any law, rule, or regulation, any such employee, former employee, or applicant shall seek corrective action from the Special Counsel before seeking corrective action from the Board. An employee, former employee, or applicant for employment may seek corrective action from the Board under section 1221, if such employee, former employee, or applicant seeks corrective action for a prohibited personnel practice described in section 2302(b)(8) or section 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D) from the Special Counsel and—

(A)(i) the Special Counsel notifies such employee, former employee, or applicant that an investigation concerning such employee, former employee, or applicant has been terminated; and

(ii) no more than 60 days have elapsed since notification was provided to such employee, former employee, or applicant for employment that such investigation was terminated; or

(B) 120 days after seeking corrective action from the Special Counsel, such employee, former employee, or applicant has not been notified by the Special Counsel that the Special Counsel shall seek corrective action on behalf of such employee, former employee, or applicant.

(4) If an employee, former employee, or applicant seeks a corrective action from the Board

under section 1221, pursuant to the provisions of paragraph (3)(B), the Special Counsel may continue to seek corrective action personal to such employee, former employee, or applicant only with the consent of such employee, former employee, or applicant.

(5) In addition to any authority granted under paragraph (1), the Special Counsel may, in the absence of an allegation, conduct an investigation for the purpose of determining whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that a prohibited personnel practice (or a pattern of prohibited personnel practices) has occurred, exists, or is to be taken.

(6)(A) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, not later than 30 days after the date on which the Special Counsel receives an allegation of a prohibited personnel practice under paragraph (1), the Special Counsel may terminate an investigation of the allegation without further inquiry if the Special Counsel determines that—

(i) the same allegation, based on the same set of facts and circumstances, had previously been—

(I)(aa) made by the individual; and

(bb) investigated by the Special Counsel;

or

(II) filed by the individual with the Merit Systems Protection Board;

(ii) the Special Counsel does not have jurisdiction to investigate the allegation; or

(iii) the individual knew or should have known of the alleged prohibited personnel practice on or before the date that is 3 years before the date on which the Special Counsel received the allegation.

(B) Not later than 30 days after the date on which the Special Counsel terminates an investigation under subparagraph (A), the Special Counsel shall provide a written notification to the individual who submitted the allegation of a prohibited personnel practice that states the basis of the Special Counsel for terminating the investigation.

(b)(1)(A)(i) The Special Counsel may request any member of the Merit Systems Protection Board to order a stay of any personnel action for 45 days if the Special Counsel determines that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the personnel action was taken, or is to be taken, as a result of a prohibited personnel practice.

(ii) Any member of the Board requested by the Special Counsel to order a stay under clause (i) shall order such stay unless the member determines that, under the facts and circumstances involved, such a stay would not be appropriate.

(iii) Unless denied under clause (ii), any stay under this subparagraph shall be granted within 3 calendar days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays) after the date of the request for the stay by the Special Counsel.

(B)(i) The Board may extend the period of any stay granted under subparagraph (A) for any period which the Board considers appropriate.

(ii) If the Board lacks the number of members appointed under section 1201 required to constitute a quorum, any remaining member of the Board may, upon request by the Special Counsel, extend the period of any stay granted under subparagraph (A).

(C) The Board shall allow any agency which is the subject of a stay to comment to the Board on any extension of stay proposed under subparagraph (B).

(D) A stay may be terminated by the Board at any time, except that a stay may not be terminated by the Board—

(i) on its own motion or on the motion of an agency, unless notice and opportunity for oral or written comments are first provided to the Special Counsel and the individual on whose behalf the stay was ordered; or

(ii) on motion of the Special Counsel, unless notice and opportunity for oral or written comments are first provided to the individual on whose behalf the stay was ordered.

(E) If the Board grants a stay under subparagraph (A), the head of the agency employing the employee who is the subject of the action shall give priority to a request for a transfer submitted by the employee.

(2)(A)(i) Except as provided under clause (ii), no later than 240 days after the date of receiving an allegation of a prohibited personnel practice under paragraph (1), the Special Counsel shall make a determination whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that a prohibited personnel practice has occurred, exists, or is to be taken.

(ii) If the Special Counsel is unable to make the required determination within the 240-day period specified under clause (i) and the person submitting the allegation of a prohibited personnel practice agrees to an extension of time, the determination shall be made within such additional period of time as shall be agreed upon between the Special Counsel and the person submitting the allegation.

(B) If, in connection with any investigation, the Special Counsel determines that there are reasonable grounds to believe that a prohibited personnel practice has occurred, exists, or is to be taken which requires corrective action, the Special Counsel shall report the determination together with any findings or recommendations to the Board, the agency involved and to the Office of Personnel Management, and may report such determination, findings and recommendations to the President. The Special Counsel may include in the report recommendations for corrective action to be taken.

(C) If, after a reasonable period of time, the agency does not act to correct the prohibited personnel practice, the Special Counsel may petition the Board for corrective action.

(D) If the Special Counsel finds, in consultation with the individual subject to the prohibited personnel practice, that the agency has acted to correct the prohibited personnel practice, the Special Counsel shall file such finding with the Board, together with any written comments which the individual may provide.

(E) A determination by the Special Counsel under this paragraph shall not be cited or referred to in any proceeding under this paragraph or any other administrative or judicial proceeding for any purpose, without the consent of the person submitting the allegation of a prohibited personnel practice.

(3) Whenever the Special Counsel petitions the Board for corrective action, the Board shall provide an opportunity for—

(A) oral or written comments by the Special Counsel, the agency involved, and the Office of Personnel Management; and

(B) written comments by any individual who alleges to be the subject of the prohibited personnel practice.

(4)(A) The Board shall order such corrective action as the Board considers appropriate, if the Board determines that the Special Counsel has demonstrated that a prohibited personnel practice, other than one described in section 2302(b)(8) or section 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D), has occurred, exists, or is to be taken.

(B)(i) Subject to the provisions of clause (ii), in any case involving an alleged prohibited personnel practice as described under section 2302(b)(8) or section 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D), the Board shall order such corrective action as the Board considers appropriate if the Special Counsel has demonstrated that a disclosure or protected activity described under section 2302(b)(8) or section 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D) was a contributing factor in the personnel action which was taken or is to be taken against the individual.

(ii) Corrective action under clause (i) may not be ordered if, after a finding that a protected disclosure was a contributing factor, the agency demonstrates by clear and convincing evidence that it would have taken the same personnel action in the absence of such disclosure.

(c)(1) Judicial review of any final order or decision of the Board under this section may be obtained by any employee, former employee, or applicant for employment adversely affected by such order or decision.

(2) A petition for review under this subsection shall be filed with such court, and within such time, as provided for under section 7703(b).

(d)(1) If, in connection with any investigation under this subchapter, the Special Counsel determines that there is reasonable cause to believe that a criminal violation has occurred, the Special Counsel shall report the determination to the Attorney General and to the head of the agency involved, and shall submit a copy of the report to the Director of the Office of Personnel Management and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

(2) In any case in which the Special Counsel determines that there are reasonable grounds to believe that a prohibited personnel practice has occurred, exists, or is to be taken, the Special Counsel shall proceed with any investigation or proceeding unless—

(A) the alleged violation has been reported to the Attorney General; and

(B) the Attorney General is pursuing an investigation, in which case the Special Counsel, after consultation with the Attorney General, has discretion as to whether to proceed.

(e) If, in connection with any investigation under this subchapter, the Special Counsel determines that there is reasonable cause to believe that any violation of any law, rule, or regulation has occurred other than one referred to in subsection (b) or (d), the Special Counsel shall report such violation to the head of the agency involved. The Special Counsel shall require, within 30 days after the receipt of the report by

the agency, a certification by the head of the agency which states—

(1) that the head of the agency has personally reviewed the report; and

(2) what action has been or is to be taken, and when the action will be completed.

(f) During any investigation initiated under this subchapter, no disciplinary action shall be taken against any employee for any alleged prohibited activity under investigation or for any related activity without the approval of the Special Counsel.

(g) If the Board orders corrective action under this section, such corrective action may include—

(1) that the individual be placed, as nearly as possible, in the position the individual would have been in had the prohibited personnel practice not occurred; and

(2) reimbursement for attorney's fees, back pay and related benefits, medical costs incurred, travel expenses, any other reasonable and foreseeable consequential damages, and compensatory damages (including interest, reasonable expert witness fees, and costs).

(h) Any corrective action ordered under this section to correct a prohibited personnel practice may include fees, costs, or damages reasonably incurred due to an agency investigation of the employee, if such investigation was commenced, expanded, or extended in retaliation for the disclosure or protected activity that formed the basis of the corrective action.

(i) The Special Counsel may petition the Board to order corrective action, including fees, costs, or damages reasonably incurred by an employee due to an investigation of the employee by an agency, if the investigation by an agency was commenced, expanded, or extended in retaliation for a disclosure or protected activity described in section 2302(b)(8) or subparagraph (A)(i), (B), (C), or (D) of section 2302(b)(9), without regard to whether a personnel action, as defined in section 2302(a)(2)(A), is taken.

(Added Pub. L. 101-12, §3(a)(13), Apr. 10, 1989, 103 Stat. 23; amended Pub. L. 103-424, §§3(c), (d), 8(a), Oct. 29, 1994, 108 Stat. 4362, 4364; Pub. L. 112-199, title I, §§101(b)(1)(A), (2)(A), 104(c)(1), 107(b), 114(a), Nov. 27, 2012, 126 Stat. 1465, 1468, 1469, 1472; Pub. L. 115-42, §1, June 27, 2017, 131 Stat. 883; Pub. L. 115-73, title I, §102(a), Oct. 26, 2017, 131 Stat. 1236; Pub. L. 115-91, div. A, title X, §1097(c)(3)(A), (4), (f), (j), Dec. 12, 2017, 131 Stat. 1619, 1622, 1625.)

#### AMENDMENTS

2017—Subsec. (a)(6). Pub. L. 115-91, §1097(f), added par. (6).

Subsec. (b)(1)(B). Pub. L. 115-42 designated existing provisions as cl. (i) and added cl. (ii).

Subsec. (b)(1)(B)(ii). Pub. L. 115-91, §1097(j), struck out “who was appointed, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate,” after “member of the Board”.

Subsec. (b)(1)(E). Pub. L. 115-91, §1097(c)(3)(A), added subpar. (E) and struck out former subpar. (E) which read as follows: “If the Merit Systems Protection Board grants a stay under this subsection, the head of the agency employing the employee shall give priority to a request for a transfer submitted by the employee.”

Pub. L. 115-73 added subpar. (E).

Subsec. (i). Pub. L. 115-91, §1097(c)(4), added subsec. (i).

2012—Subsecs. (a)(3), (b)(4)(A). Pub. L. 112-199, §101(b)(1)(A), inserted “or section 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D)” after “section 2302(b)(8)”.

Subsec. (b)(4)(B)(i). Pub. L. 112-199, §101(b)(1)(A), (2)(A), inserted “or section 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D)” after “section 2302(b)(8)” in two places and inserted “or protected activity” after “disclosure”.

Subsec. (b)(4)(B)(ii). Pub. L. 112-199, §114(a), inserted “, after a finding that a protected disclosure was a contributing factor,” after “ordered if”.

Subsec. (g)(2). Pub. L. 112-199, §107(b), substituted “any other reasonable and foreseeable consequential damages, and compensatory damages (including interest, reasonable expert witness fees, and costs).” for “and any other reasonable and foreseeable consequential damages.”

Subsec. (h). Pub. L. 112-199, §104(c)(1), added subsec. (h).

1994—Subsec. (a)(1)(D). Pub. L. 103-424, §3(c)(1), added subpar. (D).

Subsec. (a)(2)(A)(iv). Pub. L. 103-424, §3(c)(2), added cl. (iv).

Subsec. (b)(2). Pub. L. 103-424, §3(d), added subpars. (A) and (E) and redesignated former subpars. (A) to (C) as (B) to (D), respectively.

Subsec. (g). Pub. L. 103-424, §8(a), added subsec. (g).

#### EFFECTIVE DATE OF 2012 AMENDMENT

Amendment by Pub. L. 112-199 effective 30 days after Nov. 27, 2012, see section 202 of Pub. L. 112-199, set out as a note under section 1204 of this title.

#### TERMINATION STATEMENT

Pub. L. 103-424, §12(b), Oct. 29, 1994, 108 Stat. 4367, provided that: “The Special Counsel shall include in any letter terminating an investigation under section 1214(a)(2) of title 5, United States Code, the name and telephone number of an employee of the Special Counsel who is available to respond to reasonable questions from the person regarding the investigation or review conducted by the Special Counsel, the relevant facts ascertained by the Special Counsel, and the law applicable to the person’s allegations.”

### § 1215. Disciplinary action

(a)(1) Except as provided in subsection (b), if the Special Counsel determines that disciplinary action should be taken against any employee for having—

(A) committed a prohibited personnel practice,

(B) violated the provisions of any law, rule, or regulation, or engaged in any other conduct within the jurisdiction of the Special Counsel as described in section 1216, or

(C) knowingly and willfully refused or failed to comply with an order of the Merit Systems Protection Board,

the Special Counsel shall prepare a written complaint against the employee containing the Special Counsel’s determination, together with a statement of supporting facts, and present the complaint and statement to the employee and the Board, in accordance with this subsection.

(2) Any employee against whom a complaint has been presented to the Merit Systems Protection Board under paragraph (1) is entitled to—

(A) a reasonable time to answer orally and in writing, and to furnish affidavits and other documentary evidence in support of the answer;

(B) be represented by an attorney or other representative;

(C) a hearing before the Board or an administrative law judge appointed under section 3105 and designated by the Board;

(D) have a transcript kept of any hearing under subparagraph (C); and

(E) a written decision and reasons therefor at the earliest practicable date, including a copy of any final order imposing disciplinary action.

(3)(A) A final order of the Board may impose—

(i) disciplinary action consisting of removal, reduction in grade, debarment from Federal employment for a period not to exceed 5 years, suspension, or reprimand;

(ii) an assessment of a civil penalty not to exceed \$1,000; or

(iii) any combination of disciplinary actions described under clause (i) and an assessment described under clause (ii).

(B) In any case brought under paragraph (1) in which the Board finds that an employee has committed a prohibited personnel practice under section 2302(b)(8), or 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D), the Board may impose disciplinary action if the Board finds that the activity protected under section 2302(b)(8), or 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D) was a significant motivating factor, even if other factors also motivated the decision, for the employee’s decision to take, fail to take, or threaten to take or fail to take a personnel action, unless that employee demonstrates, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the employee would have taken, failed to take, or threatened to take or fail to take the same personnel action, in the absence of such protected activity.

(4) There may be no administrative appeal from an order of the Board. An employee subject to a final order imposing disciplinary action under this subsection may obtain judicial review of the order by filing a petition therefor with such court, and within such time, as provided for under section 7703(b).

(5) In the case of any State or local officer or employee under chapter 15, the Board shall consider the case in accordance with the provisions of such chapter.

(b) In the case of an employee in a confidential, policy-making, policy-determining, or policy-advocating position appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate (other than an individual in the Foreign Service of the United States), the complaint and statement referred to in subsection (a)(1), together with any response of the employee, shall be presented to the President for appropriate action in lieu of being presented under subsection (a).

(c)(1) In the case of members of the uniformed services and individuals employed by any person under contract with an agency to provide goods or services, the Special Counsel may transmit recommendations for disciplinary or other appropriate action (including the evidence on which such recommendations are based) to the head of the agency concerned.

(2) In any case in which the Special Counsel transmits recommendations to an agency head under paragraph (1), the agency head shall, within 60 days after receiving such recommendations, transmit a report to the Special Counsel on each recommendation and the action taken, or proposed to be taken, with respect to each such recommendation.