

5101 et seq.) as a part of the informal hearing process, the participant shall—

- (1) be offered the right to choose such mediation; and
- (2) to the maximum extent practicable, be allowed to use both informal agency review and mediation to resolve disputes under that title.

(Pub. L. 103-354, title II, §275, Oct. 13, 1994, 108 Stat. 3230; Pub. L. 110-234, title XII, §12032, May 22, 2008, 122 Stat. 1391; Pub. L. 110-246, §4(a), title XII, §12032, June 18, 2008, 122 Stat. 1664, 2153; Pub. L. 115-334, title XII, §12404(b)(3), Dec. 20, 2018, 132 Stat. 4975.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

The Agricultural Credit Act of 1987, referred to in subsec. (c), is Pub. L. 100-233, Jan. 6, 1988, 101 Stat. 1568. Title V of the Act is classified principally to chapter 82 (§5101 et seq.) of this title. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title of 1988 Amendments note set out under section 2001 of Title 12, Banks and Banking, and Tables.

CODIFICATION

Pub. L. 110-234 and Pub. L. 110-246 made identical amendments to this section. The amendments by Pub. L. 110-234 were repealed by section 4(a) of Pub. L. 110-246.

AMENDMENTS

2018—Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 115-334 substituted “Farm” for “Consolidated Farm” in two places.

2008—Pub. L. 110-246, §12032, designated the three sentences of existing provisions as subsecs. (a) to (c), respectively, inserted headings, and in subsec. (c) designated part of existing provisions as par. (1) and added par. (2).

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 2008 AMENDMENT

Amendment of this section and repeal of Pub. L. 110-234 by Pub. L. 110-246 effective May 22, 2008, the date of enactment of Pub. L. 110-234, see section 4 of Pub. L. 110-246, set out as an Effective Date note under section 8701 of this title.

§ 6996. Right of participants to Division hearing

(a) Appeal to Division for hearing

Subject to subsection (b), a participant shall have the right to appeal an adverse decision to the Division for an evidentiary hearing by a hearing officer consistent with section 6997 of this title.

(b) Time for appeal

To be entitled to a hearing under section 6997 of this title, a participant shall request the hearing not later than 30 days after the date on which the participant first received notice of the adverse decision.

(Pub. L. 103-354, title II, §276, Oct. 13, 1994, 108 Stat. 3230.)

§ 6997. Division hearings

(a) General powers of Director and hearing officers

(1) Access to case record

The Director and hearing officer shall have access to the case record of any adverse decision appealed to the Division for a hearing.

(2) Administrative procedures

The Director and hearing officer shall have the authority to require the attendance of wit-

nesses, and the production of evidence, by subpoena and to administer oaths and affirmations. Except to the extent required for the disposition of ex parte matters as authorized by law—

(A) an interested person outside the Division shall not make or knowingly cause to be made to the Director or a hearing officer who is or may reasonably be expected to be involved in the evidentiary hearing or review of an adverse decision, an ex parte communication (as defined in section 551(14) of title 5) relevant to the merits of the proceeding;

(B) the Director and such hearing officer shall not make or knowingly cause to be made to any interested person outside the Division an ex parte communication relevant to the merits of the proceeding.

(b) Time for hearing

Upon a timely request for a hearing under section 6996(b) of this title, an appellant shall have the right to have a hearing by the Division on the adverse decision within 45 days after the date of the receipt of the request for the hearing.

(c) Location and elements of hearing

(1) Location

A hearing on an adverse decision shall be held in the State of residence of the appellant or at a location that is otherwise convenient to the appellant and the Division.

(2) Evidentiary hearing

The evidentiary hearing before a hearing officer shall be in person, unless the appellant agrees to a hearing by telephone or by a review of the case record. The hearing officer shall not be bound by previous findings of fact by the agency in making a determination.

(3) Information at hearing

The hearing officer shall consider information presented at the hearing without regard to whether the evidence was known to the agency officer, employee, or committee making the adverse decision at the time the adverse decision was made. The hearing officer shall leave the record open after the hearing for a reasonable period of time to allow the submission of information by the appellant or the agency after the hearing to the extent necessary to respond to new facts, information, arguments, or evidence presented or raised by the agency or appellant.

(4) Burden of proof

The appellant shall bear the burden of proving that the adverse decision of the agency was erroneous.

(d) Determination notice

The hearing officer shall issue a notice of the determination on the appeal not later than 30 days after a hearing or after receipt of the request of the appellant to waive a hearing, except that the Director may establish an earlier or later deadline. If the determination is not appealed to the Director for review under section 6998 of this title, the notice provided by the hearing officer shall be considered to be a notice of an administratively final determination.

(e) Effective date

The final determination shall be effective as of the date of filing of an application, the date of the transaction or event in question, or the date of the original adverse decision, whichever is applicable.

(Pub. L. 103-354, title II, §277, Oct. 13, 1994, 108 Stat. 3230.)

§ 6998. Director review of determinations of hearing officers**(a) Requests for Director review****(1) Time for request by appellant**

Not later than 30 days after the date on which an appellant receives the determination of a hearing officer under section 6997 of this title, the appellant shall submit a written request to the Director for review of the determination in order to be entitled to a review by the Director of the determination.

(2) Time for request by agency head

Not later than 15 business days after the date on which an agency receives the determination of a hearing officer under section 6997 of this title, the head of the agency may make a written request that the Director review the determination.

(b) Determination of Director

The Director shall conduct a review of the determination of the hearing officer using the case record, the record from the evidentiary hearing under section 6997 of this title, the request for review, and such other arguments or information as may be accepted by the Director. Based on such review, the Director shall issue a final determination notice that upholds, reverses, or modifies the determination of the hearing officer. However, if the Director determines that the hearing record is inadequate, the Director may remand all or a portion of the determination for further proceedings to complete the hearing record or, at the option of the Director, to hold a new hearing. The Director shall complete the review and either issue a final determination or remand the determination not later than—

(1) 10 business days after receipt of the request for review, in the case of a request by the head of an agency for review; or

(2) 30 business days after receipt of the request for review, in the case of a request by an appellant for review.

(c) Basis for determination

The determination of the hearing officer and the Director shall be based on information from the case record, laws applicable to the matter at issue, and applicable regulations published in the Federal Register and in effect on the date of the adverse decision or the date on which the acts that gave rise to the adverse decision occurred, whichever date is appropriate.

(d) Equitable relief

Subject to regulations issued by the Secretary, the Director shall have the authority to grant equitable relief under this section in the same manner and to the same extent as such authority is provided to the Secretary under sec-

tion 7996 of this title and other laws. Notwithstanding the administrative finality of a final determination of an appeal by the Division, the Secretary shall have the authority to grant equitable or other types of relief to the appellant after an administratively final determination is issued by the Division.

(e) Effective date

A final determination issued by the Director shall be effective as of the date of filing of an application, the date of the transaction or event in question, or the date of the original adverse decision, whichever is applicable.

(Pub. L. 103-354, title II, §278, Oct. 13, 1994, 108 Stat. 3232; Pub. L. 107-171, title I, §1613(j)(2), May 13, 2002, 116 Stat. 221.)

AMENDMENTS

2002—Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 107-171 substituted “section 7996 of this title” for “section 1339a of this title”.

§ 6999. Judicial review

A final determination of the Division shall be reviewable and enforceable by any United States district court of competent jurisdiction in accordance with chapter 7 of title 5.

(Pub. L. 103-354, title II, §279, Oct. 13, 1994, 108 Stat. 3233.)

§ 7000. Implementation of final determinations of Division**(a) In general**

On the return of a case to an agency pursuant to the final determination of the Division, the head of the agency shall implement the final determination not later than 30 days after the effective date of the notice of the final determination.

(b) Reports**(1) In general**

Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this subsection, and every 180 days thereafter, the head of each agency shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate, and publish on the website of the Department, a report that includes—

(A) a description of all cases returned to the agency during the period covered by the report pursuant to a final determination of the Division;

(B) the status of implementation of each final determination; and

(C) if the final determination has not been implemented—

(i) the reason that the final determination has not been implemented; and

(ii) the projected date of implementation of the final determination.

(2) Updates

Each month, the head of each agency shall publish on the website of the Department any updates to the reports submitted under paragraph (1).

(Pub. L. 103-354, title II, §280, Oct. 13, 1994, 108 Stat. 3233; Pub. L. 110-234, title XIV, §14009, May