BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF:

PARENT ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

SEQUOIA UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT.

OAH CASE NUMBER 2020090328

# ORDER DETERMINING COMPLAINT INSUFFICIENT

SEPTEMBER 22, 2020

On September 9, 2020, Student filed a Due Process Hearing Request, called a complaint, with the Office of Administrative Hearings, referred to as OAH, naming Sequoia Union High School District. On September 22, 2020, Sequoia Union High School District, called Sequoia Union, filed a notice of insufficiency of the complaint.

## APPLICABLE LAW

The named parties have the right to challenge the complaint's sufficiency. (20 U.S.C. § 1415(b) & (c).) The party filing the complaint is not entitled to a hearing unless the complaint meets the requirements of title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A).

The complaint is deemed sufficient unless a party notifies OAH and the other party in writing within 15 days of receiving the complaint that the party believes the complaint has not met the notice requirements. (20 U.S.C. § 1415(c)(2)(C); Ed. Code, § 56502, subd. (d)(1).)

A complaint is sufficient if it: (1) describes the problem relating to the proposed change regarding the Student's identification, evaluation, or educational placement, or providing the Student a free appropriate public education; (2) includes facts about the problem; and (3) includes a proposed resolution to the extent known and available to the party at the time. (20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii)(III) & (IV).) These requirements prevent vague and confusing complaints, and promote fairness by providing the named parties with sufficient information to know how to prepare for the hearing and how to participate in resolution sessions and mediation. (See H.R.Rep. No. 108-77, 1st Sess. (2003), p. 115; Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, 1st Sess. (2003), pp. 34-35.)

The complaint provides enough information when it provides "an awareness and understanding of the issues forming the basis of the complaint." (Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, *supra*, at p. 34.) The pleading requirements should be liberally construed in light of the broad remedial purposes of the IDEA and the relative informality of the due process hearings it authorizes. (*Alexandra R. ex rel. Burke v. Brookline School Dist.* (D.N.H., Sept. 10, 2009, CIV. 06-CV-0215-JL) 2009 WL 2957991[nonpub. Opn.]; *Escambia County Bd. Of Educ. V. Benton* (S.D. Ala. 2005) 406 F.Supp.2d 1248, 1259-1260; *Sammons v. Polk County School Bd.* (M.D. Fla., Oct. 28, 2005, 8:04CV2657T24EAJ) 2005 WL 2850076 [nonpub. Opn.]; but cf. *M.S.-G v. Lenape Regional High School Dist. Bd. Of Educ.* (3d Cir. 2009) 306 Fed.Appx. 772, 775 [nonpub. Opn.].) Whether the complaint is sufficient is a matter within the sound discretion of the administrative law judge. (*Assistance to States*

*for the Educ. Of Children with Disabilities & Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities* (Aug. 14, 2006) 71 FR 46,540-46541, 46699.)

## DISCUSSION

Here, Sequoia Union timely filed its notice of insufficiency and asserted that Student's complaint is insufficient asserting it is vague, does not identify a particular individualized program, lacks supporting facts, and includes issues outside OAH's jurisdiction.

Student's complaint alleges two insufficiently pled issues because they fail to give Sequoia Union the requisite notice as to the description of the nature of the problem, and facts related to the problem.

Student's issue one fails to specify a time period, any individual education program, called IEP, offer, and what is deficient. As written, issue one may include multiple school years and multiple IEP offers. Additionally, it is difficult to determine if Student alleges deficiencies with accommodations, services, or both. And, if any deficiencies are related to a mental health issue, behavior, or both. Thus, issue one is insufficient.

As to issue number two, Student does not specify any time period. Further, Student alleges discrimination but fails to give any facts in support of this contention. Without facts, it is unclear how it relates to a denial of a free and appropriate public education, and if the allegation is within the purview of OAH. The allegation, therefore, is insufficiently pled.

A parent without an attorney may request that OAH provide a mediator to assist the parent in identifying the issues and proposed resolutions that must be included in a

complaint. (Ed. Code, § 56505.) Parents are encouraged to contact OAH for assistance if they intend to amend their due process hearing request.

## ORDER

1. Student's complaint is insufficiently pled under section title 20 United States Code 1415(c)(2)(D).
2. Student shall be permitted to file an amended complaint under title 20 United States Code section 1415(c)(2)(E)(i)(II).
3. The amended complaint shall comply with the requirements of title 20 U.S.C. section 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii) and must be filed not later than 14 days from the date of this order.
4. If Student fails to file a timely amended complaint, the complaint will be dismissed.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DocuSigned by:
Cynthia Fritz
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Cynthia Fritz

Administrative Law Judge

Office of Administrative Hearings