



Issue Date: 16 July 2010

*In the Matter of*

**TINA L. GEIGER**

Complainant

v.

Case Number **2010 STA 00051**

**W.N. MOREHOUSE TRUCK LINE, INC.**

Respondent

## **RECOMMENDED DECISION AND ORDER APPROVAL OF SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT**

This proceeding arises under Section 405 of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 (hereinafter "STAA"), 49 U.S.C. § 31105 (formerly 49 U.S.C. App. § 2305); 29 C.F.R. Part 1978, implementing regulations found at 29 C.F.R. Part 24; and the Rules of Practice and Procedure for Administrative Hearings before the Office of Administrative Law Judges found at 29 C.F.R. Part 18. The Complainant is represented by Paul Taylor, Esquire, of Burnsville, Minnesota, while the Respondent is represented by Bradford E. Kistler, Esquire, Lincoln Nebraska.

I am asked to approve a settlement set forth in a settlement agreement and to dismiss this proceeding with prejudice.

Under the STAA and implementing regulations, a proceeding may be terminated on a basis of a settlement provided either the Secretary or the Administrative Law Judge approves the agreement. 49 U.S.C. app. § 2305 (c)(2)(A); 29 C.F.R. § 1978.111(d)(2). The parties must submit for review an entire agreement to which each party has consented. *Tankersley v. Triple Crown Services, Inc.*, 92-STA-8 (Sec'y Feb. 18, 1993). The agreement must be reviewed to determine whether the terms are a fair, adequate and reasonable settlement of the complaint. *Macktal v. Secretary of Labor*, 923 F.2d 1150 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1991); *Thompson v. U.S. Department of Labor*, 885 F.2d 551 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1989); *Fuchko and Yunker v. Georgia Power Co.*, Case Nos. 89-ERA-9, 89-ERA-10, Sec'y Ord. Mar. 23, 1989, slip op. at 1-2.

I find the overall settlement terms to be reasonable, but I note that the Settlement Agreement is marked as confidential. I find that the provisions are acceptable. *See generally Connecticut Light & Power Co. v. Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor*, 85 F.3d 89 (2<sup>nd</sup> Cir. 1996). However, the parties are advised that records in whistleblower cases are agency records which the agency must make available for public inspection and copying under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552. It has been held in a number of cases with respect to confidentiality provisions in Settlement Agreements that the FOIA requires federal agencies to disclose requested documents unless they are exempt from disclosure. *Faust v. Chemical Leaman Tank Lines*, Case Nos. 92-SWD-2 and 93-STA-15, ARB Final Order Approving Settlement and Dismissing Complaint, March 31, 1998. The records in this case are agency records which must be made available for public inspection and copying under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Rules of Practice and Procedure for Administrative Hearings before the Office of Administrative Law Judges, 29 C.F.R. Part 18 are applicable to these proceedings. 29 C.F.R. § 1978.106(a). Where the parties arrive at an adjudicatory settlement, the Agreement must be approved by the Administrative Law Judge. 29 C.F.R. § 1978.111(d)(2). Thus, the procedure to be applied in reviewing the Settlement Agreement is that provided by 29 C.F.R. 18.9 dealing with the entry of a Consent Order or Settlement. This case involves the review a Settlement Agreement and Release, and the final disposition is controlled by 29 C.F.R. § 18.9.

After a review of the record, I find that the Settlement Agreement is fair, adequate and reasonable, and accordingly, recommend approval.

## **SO ORDERED**

A

Daniel F. Solomon  
Administrative Law Judge

**NOTICE OF REVIEW:** The administrative law judge's Recommended Order Approving Settlement, along with the Administrative File, will be automatically forwarded for review to the Administrative Review Board, U.S. Department of Labor, Suite S-5220, 200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20210. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 1978.109(a); Secretary's Order 1-2002, ¶4.c.(35), 67 Fed. Reg. 64272 (2002).

Within thirty (30) days of the date of issuance of the administrative law judge's Recommended Order Approving Settlement, the parties may file briefs with the Administrative Review Board ("Board") in support of, or in opposition to, the administrative law judge's order unless the Board, upon notice to the parties, establishes a different briefing schedule. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 1978.109(c)(2). All further inquiries and correspondence in this matter should be directed to the Board.