



# OFFICE OF RESOLUTION MANAGEMENT



Annual Report  
2007

# Message from the Deputy Assistant Secretary

Let me begin by thanking our stakeholders for their support and expressing my profound appreciation to the employees of the Office of Resolution Management for their hard work in making FY 2007 a successful year. This was the first full year of our transition from a complaint processing organization to one dedicated to resolving workplace disputes under our new four-year Strategic Plan.



ORM's ultimate objective is a discrimination-free work environment where all workplace disputes are resolved quickly. To achieve this objective, we must sharpen our outreach efforts to VA's managers and employees by communicating ways to improve the workplace environment and continuing to provide training on the principles of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). We must also continue our efforts to streamline the processing of complaints. Finally, we must maintain our commitment to a highly qualified and committed workforce that takes pride in serving and honoring our Nation's veterans.

Our plan of action, outlined in our Strategic Plan, is comprised of four overarching goals: Prevention, Early Resolution, Process Improvement, and Developing a High Quality Workforce. We use 15 performance measures to monitor our progress. This past year, we surpassed, met, or almost met nearly all of our performance targets. We failed to meet our expectations in the timeliness of our investigations, but we have addressed the underlying problem and are on track to reach our timeliness goals for 2008. In addition, our employee satisfaction rate was low — 62 percent. We are taking the necessary steps to identify the problems behind this result and develop specific solutions. To view the status of all of our performance measures, visit our website: <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/sport.asp>.

Last year marked the tenth anniversary of the passage of legislation creating the Office of Resolution Management - it is portrayed on the back cover of this 2007 edition of our Annual Report. This anniversary coincides with the adoption of our new Strategic Plan — and our shift in focus from complaint processing to dispute resolution. This shift represents a level of maturity within the organization that acknowledges the success we have achieved in reducing our processing times while at the same time challenging us with other systemic issues to address.

We are guided in all of our activities by a vision of VA as the recognized leader in promoting a discrimination-free environment. Any success that we have is due in large part to the efforts of our customers. Ultimately, our achievements will be measured by the degree to which disputes within our customers' work environments are defused quickly and productive work relationships preserved. To that end, we will provide VA's supervisors and employees with the information and training they need to recognize and resolve workplace disputes as early as possible, so that people at all levels within the Department can focus on the honorable work before them — serving America's veterans and their families.

Rafael A. Torres

# Prevention

Raising awareness among managers and staff is the first step toward creating a VA work environment free of discrimination. ORM has developed an array of tools to help managers and their staffs increase their understanding of potential conflicts within the work environment, address the underlying causes of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints, and create a healthier atmosphere in which to serve our veterans.

*Ultimately, our efforts will be measured by the degree to which disputes within our customers' work environments are defused quickly and work relationships preserved.*

**Trend Data** – On a semi-annual basis, we provide comparative charts of EEO complaint activity to all Administrations, broken down to the facility level. This data allows facility managers, at a glance, to see how they and other comparable facilities are doing with respect to EEO complaint activity.

**Root Cause Analysis Report** – This report, provided annually to VA senior managers, analyzes all EEO complaints that are reported and identifies the underlying reasons for the complaints.

The purpose of the Trend Data and Root Cause Analysis Reports, both of which are available on our website, is to develop awareness, facilitate discussions, and generate a higher level of understanding that will promote positive changes in the workplace. **The Root Cause Toolkit**, a collection of different training options and informational sources devoted specifically to reducing and preventing disputes, is also available on our website: <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/>, click on “Root Cause Reports.”

**The Organization Climate Assessment Program (OCAP)** is designed to help VA managers recognize what drives employee satisfaction. The program – comprised of a survey, focus groups, and individual interviews – was employed six times at VA facilities in 2007. In 2008, OCAP will be incorporated into HR&A’s “Comprehensive Reviews.” These on-site assessments examine systems that are part of the Office of Personnel Management’s Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework.

To extend the growing knowledge base of what causes workplace disputes to VA employees, this year ORM produced six short video dramatizations of the types of workplace disputes that frequently lead to discrimination complaints. These **Root Cause Vignettes**, along with a companion teaching guide, will be used for training and conference events in the future.

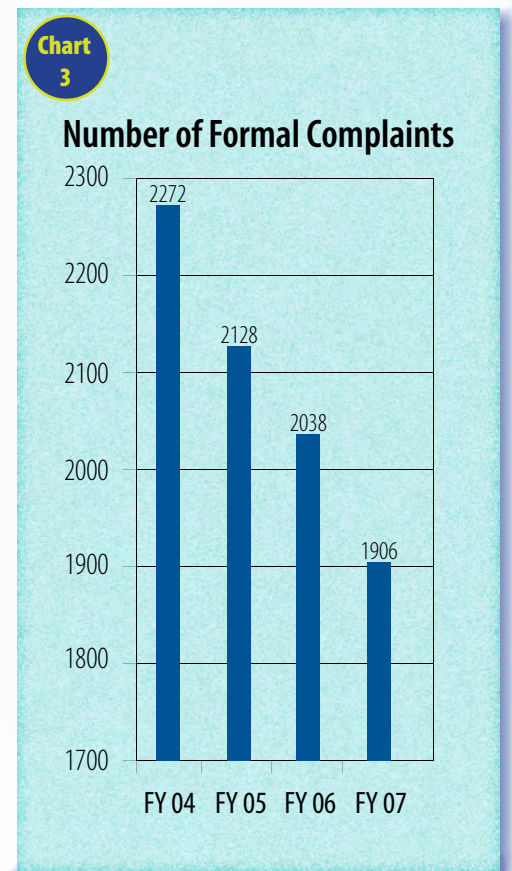
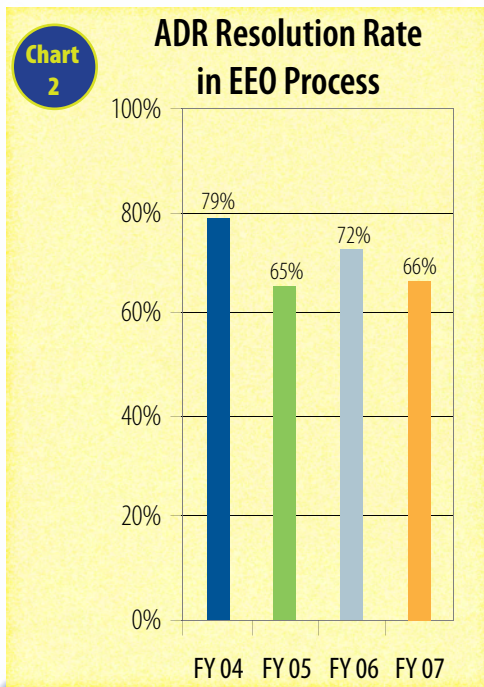
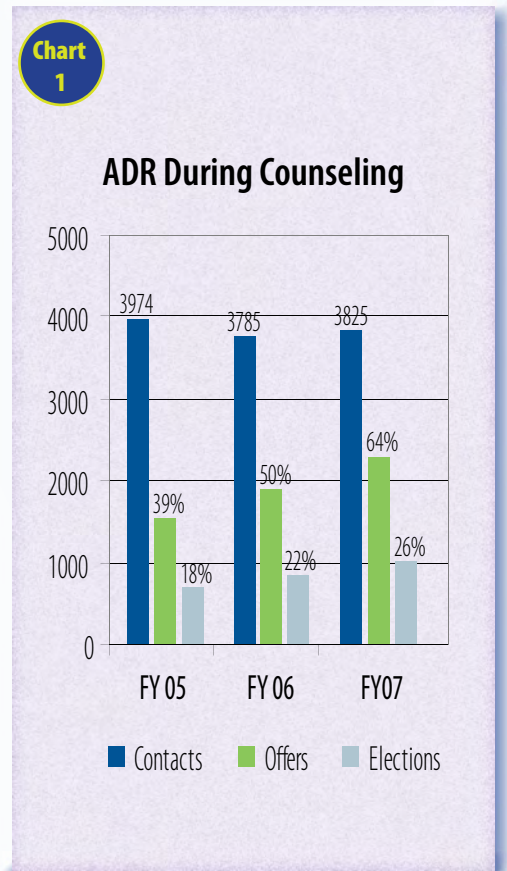
# Early Resolution

VA's **Workplace Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program** is a creative and cost-effective way of resolving disputes. When utilized early in conflict situations, ADR can help managers and employees preserve valuable work relationships by addressing workplace disputes that might otherwise develop into lengthy EEO complaints. In 2007, ORM assumed full responsibility for policy and oversight of VA's Workplace ADR Program, a change that allows for a more centralized and consistent focus with full-time resources dedicated to the program.

Our efforts to promote ADR continue to produce good results. When confronted with an EEO complaint, the percentage of times that managers offer ADR as a way to address the dispute is rising dramatically — from 39 percent in 2005 to 64 percent in 2007. During that same period, ADR elections by employees rose as well, from 18 percent to 26 percent (**Chart 1**). Furthermore, when ADR is elected in the EEO process, VA achieves a dispute resolution rate that exceeds the government-wide average of 50 percent. In 2007, 66 percent of the EEO cases that went through ADR were resolved (**Chart 2**).

One of ORM's long-term objectives has been to reduce the number of complaints that go from the informal stage to the formal stage. In 2007, this number declined by 6.5 percent from the previous year, from 2,038 to 1,906. This continues a downward trend dating from 2004 (**Chart 3**).

This success is due to a number of factors. ORM and the VA Administrations remain vigorous in promoting ADR as an effective way to resolve complaints as early and as quickly as possible. We are getting increasing support and encouragement from our stakeholders, notably the National Partnership Council, which endorsed VA's ADR program this past year. Additionally, our training program is increasing the scope of its offerings and its outreach.

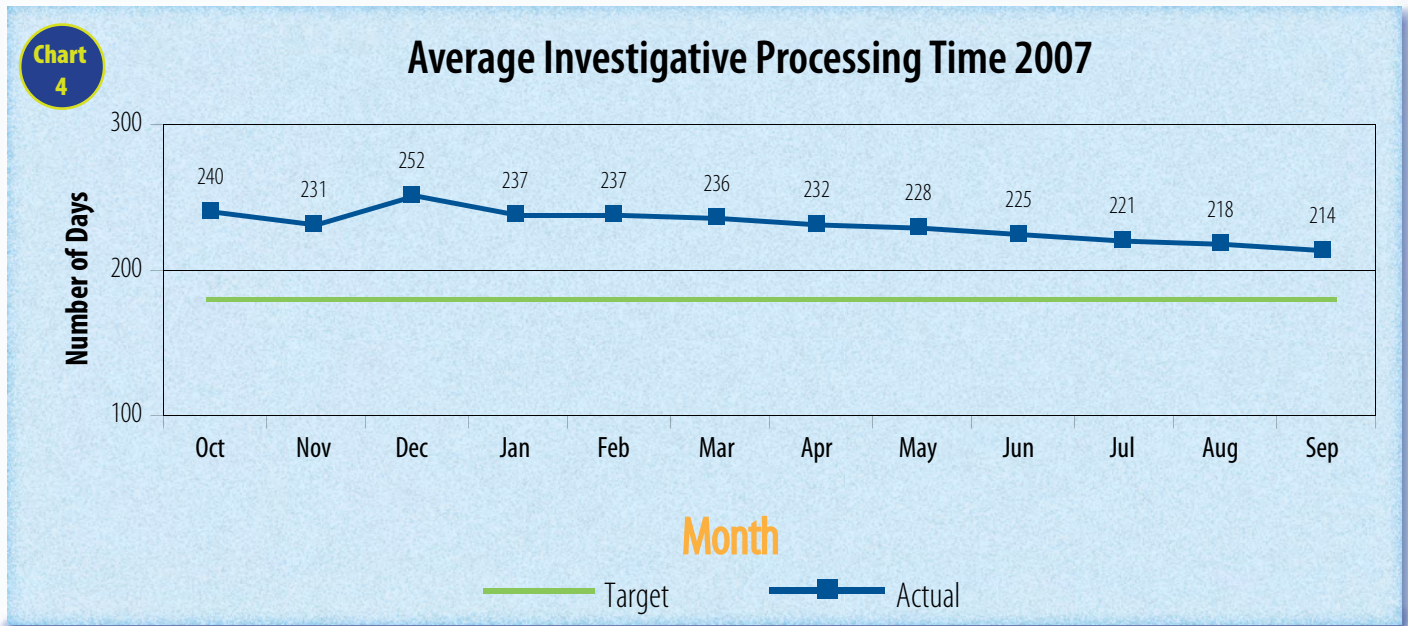


# Process Improvement

Perhaps our biggest challenge in 2007 was an enormous investigative backlog that threatened to derail our efforts in meeting the EEOC regulatory requirement of 180 days for average completion time of investigations. Through the concerted effort of our operational staff, we eliminated a significant portion of that backlog but we did not meet our 180-day target by the end of the fiscal year. However, for the month of September, we were able to reduce the average investigative processing time to 169 days bringing our cumulative average for the year to 214 days (**Chart 4**). Barring unforeseen developments, we anticipate reaching our target of 180 days in 2008.

*Our ultimate objective is a discrimination-free work environment where all workplace disputes are resolved quickly.*

An initiative that was implemented during 2007, the Complaints Automated Tracking System (CATS) should improve our processing efficiency. This system tracks all of the work steps involved in completing an EEO complaint, and allows ORM to efficiently manage workload virtually, through a paperless system using scanned files. We expect that CATS will further improve the timeliness and accuracy of our report processing. Other key efficiency indicators for process improvement can be found among the Strategic Performance Measures on our website.



# ORM's Workforce

The principle of promoting a positive and healthy work environment is not lost when it comes to ORM's own internal work environment. Indeed, it is stated explicitly in our Strategic Plan that ORM will "recruit, develop, train, and retain a highly competent and diverse workforce by promoting a positive work environment." ORM continually strives to fulfill this commitment.

## **"You Make a Difference"**

*For four consecutive quarters, ORM employees have won the Office of Human Resources and Administration's Employee of the Quarter Award.*

When we administered a questionnaire to a sample of ORM employees last year, 62 percent of the respondents rated their work environment as either average or above average, indicating substantial room for improvement. A more extensive All Employee Assessment is planned for 2008.

We are working hard to communicate better with our 221 employees. Efforts include an ombudsman, monthly newsletters, a suggestion program, and employee meetings to discuss particular job-related concerns.

ORM is also focusing attention on the professional development of its employees. Our 2007 initiatives included enhanced employee training and recognition. In 2008, we will explore ways to help employees map out specific career paths, and will re-establish the EEO Career Intern Program.

As we continue to seek ways to bring about improvements within our own office, we will keep you advised of our overall progress in resolving workplace disputes and creating a discrimination-free work environment via the Strategic Performance Measures that are regularly updated on our website:

<http://vaww.va.gov/orm/>.



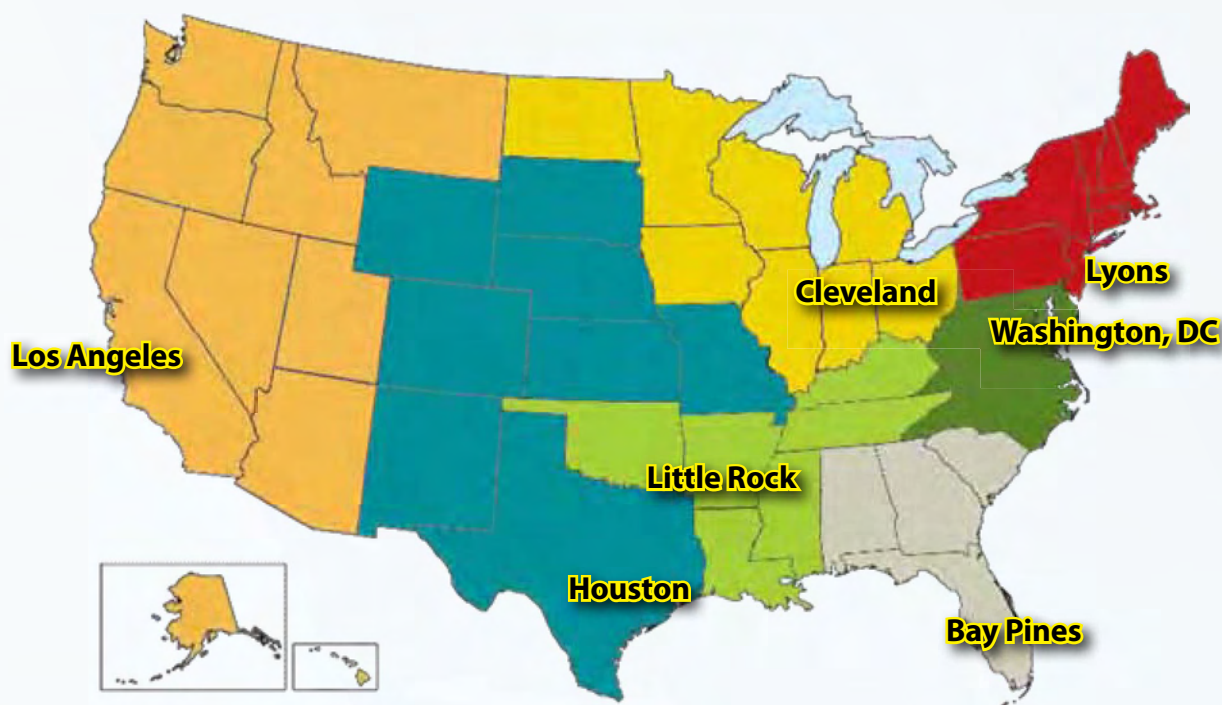
# Contacting ORM

## HEADQUARTERS

**Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management:  
Chief Operating Officer:**

Rafael A. Torres  
Rosa C. Franco

**PHONE:** 1-202-501-2800 Toll Free: 1-888-737-3361 TDD: 1-888-626-9008  
**ADDRESS:** Office of Resolution Management (08)  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420



## Field Offices

**Western Operations - Los Angeles, CA (301) 268-3586**  
Satellite Offices: Long Beach, CA; Palo Alto, CA; Vancouver, WA

**Central Plains Operations - Houston, TX (713) 794-7756**  
Satellite Offices: Leavenworth, KS; St. Louis, MO

**Mid-South Operations - Little Rock, AR (501) 257-1581**

**Northeastern Operations - Lyons, NJ (908) 604-5349**  
Satellite Offices: New York, NY; Bedford, MA

**Mid-Atlantic Operations - Washington, DC (202) 501-2760**

**Southeastern Operations - Bay Pines, FL (727) 319-1193**  
Satellite Office: Lake City, FL

**Great Lakes Operations - Cleveland, OH (440) 717-2852**  
Satellite Office: Hines, IL



# OFFICE OF RESOLUTION MANAGEMENT

*Since 1997*

*“...ensuring that the (complaint resolution) system is administered in an objective, fair and effective manner”*

111 STAT. 2278

PUBLIC LAW 105–114–NOV. 21, 1997

## **TITLE I—EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY PROCESS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

### **SEC. 101 EQUAL EMPLOYMENT RESPONSIBILITIES.**

(a) IN GENERAL—(1) Chapter 5 is amended by inserting at the end of subchapter I the following new section:

“§516. Equal employment responsibilities

“(a) The Secretary shall provide that the employment discrimination complaint resolution system within the Department be established and administered so as to encourage timely and fair resolution of concerns and complaints. The Secretary shall take steps to ensure that the system is administered in an objective, fair, and effective manner and in a manner that is perceived by employees and other interested parties as being objective, fair, and effective.

“(b) The Secretary shall provide—

“(1) that employees responsible for counseling functions associated with employment discrimination and for receiving, investigating, and processing complaints of employment discrimination shall be supervised in those functions by, and report to, an Assistant Secretary or a Deputy Assistant Secretary for complaint resolution management; and

“(2) that employees performing employment discrimination complaint resolution functions at a facility of the Department shall not be subject to the authority, direction, and control of the Director of the facility with respect to those functions.