

Circuit Court for Prince George's County
Case No.: C-16-CV-23-005218

UNREPORTED*

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND

No. 1128

September Term, 2024

IN THE MATTER OF
STELLA REEVES

Wells, C.J.,
Leahy,
Kehoe, Christopher B.
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

PER CURIAM

Filed: October 31, 2025

*This is a per curiam opinion. Under Rule 1-104, the opinion is not precedent within the rule of stare decisis, nor may it be cited as persuasive authority.

In May 2023, Appellant Stella Reeves was rejected on probation by the Appellee Motor Vehicle Administration (“MVA”). An administrative law judge (“ALJ”) at the Office of Administrative Hearings upheld Reeves’s rejection. She then petitioned for judicial review in the Circuit Court for Prince George’s County, which affirmed the ALJ’s decision. Reeves appealed and presents four questions for our review, which we distill to one: Whether the ALJ erred in upholding Reeves’s rejection on probation. For the reasons below, we too shall affirm.

In reviewing an administrative appeal, we look through the judicial proceedings and evaluate the agency’s decision. *Motor Vehicle Admin. v. Carpenter*, 424 Md. 401, 413 (2012). For findings of fact, this review is highly deferential. *Kor-Ko Ltd. v. Md. Dep’t of Env’t*, 451 Md. 401, 412 (2017). Our review “is limited to determining if there is substantial evidence in the record as a whole to support the agency’s findings and conclusions[.]” *Carpenter*, 424 Md. at 412 (cleaned up). This standard requires only enough evidence that a “reasoning mind reasonably could have reached the factual conclusion reached by the agency.” *Comptroller v. FC-GEN Operations Invs. LLC*, 482 Md. 343, 359 (2022) (cleaned up).

Career service employees hired into the MVA must serve a six-month probationary period. COMAR 11.02.02.05A. This period may be extended up to an additional six months at the employer’s discretion. *See id.* A probationary employee may be “rejected on probation”—*i.e.*, terminated—for almost any reason. *See* COMAR 11.02.02.05F; COMAR 11.02.02.05G. Any appeal “is limited to the legal and constitutional basis for the rejection.” COMAR 11.02.02.05J(2).

A probationary employee’s rejection is “illegal” if it “contravene[s] public policy.” *Smack v. Dep’t of Health & Mental Hygiene*, 134 Md. App. 412, 421 (2000), *aff’d* 378 Md. 298 (2003). Examples of Maryland’s public policies that have received protection include: (1) “the refusal to violate clients’ and customers’ constitutional rights to privacy”; (2) “freedom from and opposition to sexual harassment that amounted to assault and battery”; (3) “freedom from gender-based discrimination”; (4) “the protection of children from abuse or neglect”; (5) exercise of an employee’s First Amendment rights; and (6) “exercise of worker’s compensation rights[.]” *Id.* at 428. In short, a rejection is illegal if “an employee is retaliated against for a refusal to engage in illegal activity, or the intention to fulfill a statutorily prescribed duty.” *Id.* at 427 (cleaned up). The employee bears the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that their rejection was illegal. COMAR 11.02.02.05J(4); COMAR 11.02.08.10K(3)(b).

Here, the ALJ held a two-day evidentiary hearing. Reeves’s case consisted only of her own testimony. She claimed, among other things, that she was confronted on-the-job by an armed gunman; bullied by her managers and peers; subjected to sexual harassment; and was not provided proper training. According to Reeves, she was rejected on probation for reporting these various incidents. She did not produce any other evidence to corroborate her claims.

The MVA, on the other hand, produced evidence refuting Reeves’s claims. It showed that at least one other employee had formally complained about Reeves sexually harassing them by comparing the employee’s backside to the backsides of other employees. Reeves’s supervisor also testified that Reeves did not report the alleged incident with the

armed gunman until months after it supposedly occurred. He explained that he investigated the claim but could not review any video footage because Reeves was unable to provide an exact date for the incident and no other employees knew anything about it. Other evidence from the MVA included complaints by other employees about Reeves’s behavior and lack of professionalism. The MVA also detailed its repeated attempts to train Reeves and to curb her unprofessional conduct.

The ALJ concluded that the incidents about which Reeves complained did not occur. The ALJ expressly found that Reeves’s testimony was not credible, while her supervisor’s testimony—which “was in direct opposition” to Reeves’s testimony—was “detailed and credible[.]” Indeed, the ALJ found all the testimony from the MVA’s witnesses refuting Reeves’s claims to be “comprehensive and credible.” In the end, the ALJ concluded that there was no evidence that Reeves was rejected on probation for an illegal or unconstitutional reason.

On appeal, Reeves repeats her factual claims, arguing primarily that the ALJ should have accepted her testimony over the MVA’s witnesses. But “[i]t is not our role to retry the case.” *Smith v. State*, 415 Md. 174, 185 (2010). “Because the fact-finder possesses the unique opportunity to view the evidence and to observe first-hand the demeanor and to assess the credibility of witnesses during their live testimony, we do not re-weigh the credibility of witnesses or attempt to resolve any conflicts in the evidence.” *Id.* Reeves does not point to anything in the record that shows that the ALJ’s factual findings were clearly erroneous.

In short, the ALJ concluded that Reeves was not rejected on probation for an illegal or unconstitutional reason. The ALJ based their decision on the significant amount of testimony and documentary evidence from the MVA—which the ALJ found credible—directly refuting Reeves’s testimony. The decision was, therefore, supported by substantial evidence. Consequently, the ALJ did not err in upholding Reeves’s rejection.

**JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT
COURT FOR PRINCE GEORGE’S
COUNTY AFFIRMED. COSTS TO
BE PAID BY APPELLANT.**