

completed before the date of the hearing, the case will be sent to the administrative law judge unless a fully favorable decision is in process or you and all other parties to the hearing agree in writing to delay the hearing until the proceedings are completed.

(b) *When prehearing proceedings may be conducted by an attorney advisor.* An attorney advisor may conduct prehearing proceedings if you have filed a claim for benefits based on disability and—

(1) New and material evidence is submitted;

(2) There is an indication that additional evidence is available;

(3) There is a change in the law or regulations; or

(4) There is an error in the file or some other indication that a fully favorable decision may be issued.

(c) *Nature of the prehearing proceedings that may be conducted by an attorney advisor.* As part of the prehearing proceedings, the attorney advisor, in addition to reviewing the existing record, may—

(1) Request additional evidence that may be relevant to the claim, including medical evidence; and

(2) If necessary to clarify the record for the purpose of determining if a fully favorable decision is warranted, schedule a conference with the parties.

(d) *Notice of a decision by an attorney advisor.* If the attorney advisor issues a fully favorable decision under this section, we shall mail a written notice of the decision to all parties at their last known address. We shall state the basis for the decision and advise all parties that an administrative law judge will dismiss the hearing request unless a party requests that the hearing proceed. A request to proceed with the hearing must be made in writing within 30 days after the date the notice of the decision of the attorney advisor is mailed.

(e) *Effect of actions under this section.* If under this section, an administrative law judge dismisses a request for a hearing, the dismissal is binding in accordance with § 404.959 unless it is vacated by an administrative law judge or the Appeals Council pursuant to § 404.960. A decision made by an attorney

advisor under this section is binding unless—

(1) A party files a request to proceed with the hearing pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section and an administrative law judge makes a decision;

(2) The Appeals Council reviews the decision on its own motion pursuant to § 404.969 as explained in paragraph (f)(3) of this section; or

(3) The decision of the attorney advisor is revised under the procedures explained in § 404.987.

(f) *Ancillary provisions.* For the purposes of the procedures authorized by this section, the regulations of part 404 shall apply to—

(1) Authorize an attorney advisor to exercise the functions performed by an administrative law judge under §§ 404.1520a and 404.1546;

(2) Define the term “decision” to include a decision made by an attorney advisor, as well as the decisions identified in § 404.901; and

(3) Make the decision of an attorney advisor subject to review by the Appeals Council under § 404.969 if an administrative law judge dismisses the request for a hearing following issuance of the decision, and the Appeals Council decides to review the decision of the attorney advisor anytime within 60 days after the date of the dismissal.

(g) *Sunset provision.* The provisions of this section will no longer be effective on August 10, 2011, unless we terminate them earlier or extend them beyond that date by notice of a final rule in the FEDERAL REGISTER.

[60 FR 34131, June 30, 1995, as amended at 63 FR 35516, June 30, 1998; 64 FR 13678, Mar. 22, 1999; 64 FR 51893, Sept. 27, 1999; 72 FR 44765, Aug. 9, 2007; 73 FR 76944, Dec. 18, 2008; 74 FR 33328, July 13, 2009]

§ 404.943 Responsibilities of the adjudication officer.

(a)(1) *General.* Under the procedures set out in this section we will test modifications to the procedures we follow when you file a request for a hearing before an administrative law judge in connection with a claim for benefits based on disability where the question of whether you are under a disability as defined in § 404.1505 is at issue. These modifications will enable us to test the

effect of having an adjudication officer be your primary point of contact after you file a hearing request and before you have a hearing with an administrative law judge. The tests may be conducted alone, or in combination with the tests of the modifications to the disability determination procedures which we conduct under § 404.906. The adjudication officer, working with you and your representative, if any, will identify issues in dispute, develop evidence, conduct informal conferences, and conduct any other prehearing proceeding as may be necessary. The adjudication officer has the authority to make a decision fully favorable to you if the evidence so warrants. If the adjudication officer does not make a decision on your claim, your hearing request will be assigned to an administrative law judge for further proceedings.

(2) *Procedures for cases included in the tests.* Prior to commencing tests of the adjudication officer position in selected site(s), we will publish a notice in the FEDERAL REGISTER. The notice will describe where the specific test site(s) will be and the duration of the test(s). We will also state whether the tests of the adjudication officer position in each site will be conducted alone, or in combination with the tests of the modifications to the disability determination procedures which we conduct under § 404.906. The individuals who participate in the test(s) will be assigned randomly to a test group in each site where the tests are conducted.

(b)(1) *Prehearing procedures conducted by an Adjudication Officer.* When you file a request for a hearing before an administrative law judge in connection with a claim for benefits based on disability where the question of whether you are under a disability as defined in § 404.1505 is at issue, the adjudication officer will conduct an interview with you. The interview may take place in person, by telephone, or by videoconference, as the adjudication officer determines is appropriate under the circumstances of your case. If you file a request for an extension of time to request a hearing in accordance with § 404.933(c), the adjudication officer may develop information on, and may

decide where the adjudication officer issues a fully favorable decision to you that you had good cause for missing the deadline for requesting a hearing. To determine whether you had good cause for missing the deadline, the adjudication officer will use the standards contained in § 404.911.

(2) *Representation.* The adjudication officer will provide you with information regarding the hearing process, including your right to representation. As may be appropriate, the adjudication officer will provide you with referral sources for representation, and give you copies of necessary documents to facilitate the appointment of a representative. If you have a representative, the adjudication officer will conduct an informal conference with the representative, in person or by telephone, to identify the issues in dispute and prepare proposed written agreements for the approval of the administrative law judge regarding those issues which are not in dispute and those issues proposed for the hearing. If you decide to proceed without representation, the adjudication officer may hold an informal conference with you. If you obtain representation after the adjudication officer has concluded that your case is ready for a hearing, the administrative law judge will return your case to the adjudication officer who will conduct an informal conference with you and your representative.

(3) *Evidence.* You, or your representative, may submit, or may be asked to obtain and submit, additional evidence to the adjudication officer. As the adjudication officer determines is appropriate under the circumstances of your case, the adjudication officer may refer the claim for further medical or vocational evidence.

(4) *Referral for a hearing.* The adjudication officer will refer the claim to the administrative law judge for further proceedings when the development of evidence is complete, and you or your representative agree that a hearing is ready to be held. If you or your representative are unable to agree with the adjudication officer that the development of evidence is complete, the adjudication officer will note your disagreement and refer the claim to the

administrative law judge for further proceedings. At this point, the administrative law judge conducts all further hearing proceedings, including scheduling and holding a hearing (§ 404.936), considering any additional evidence or arguments submitted (§§ 404.935, 404.944, 404.949, 404.950), and issuing a decision or dismissal of your request for a hearing, as may be appropriate (§§ 404.948, 404.953, 404.957). In addition, if the administrative law judge determines on or before the date of your hearing that the development of evidence is not complete, the administrative law judge may return the claim to the adjudication officer to complete the development of the evidence and for such other action as necessary.

(c)(1) *Fully favorable decisions issued by an adjudication officer.* If, after a hearing is requested but before it is held, the adjudication officer decides that the evidence in your case warrants a decision which is fully favorable to you, the adjudication officer may issue such a decision. For purposes of the tests authorized under this section, the adjudication officer's decision shall be considered to be a decision as defined in § 404.901. If the adjudication officer issues a decision under this section, it will be in writing and will give the findings of fact and the reasons for the decision. The adjudication officer will evaluate the issues relevant to determining whether or not you are disabled in accordance with the provisions of the Social Security Act, the rules in this part and part 422 of this chapter and applicable Social Security Rulings. For cases in which the adjudication officer issues a decision, he or she may determine your residual functional capacity in the same manner that an administrative law judge is authorized to do so in § 404.1546. The adjudication officer may also evaluate the severity of your mental impairments in the same manner that an administrative law judge is authorized to do so under § 404.1520a. The adjudication officer's decision will be based on the evidence which is included in the record and, subject to paragraph (c)(2) of this section, will complete the actions that will be taken on your request for hearing. A copy of the decision will be mailed to all parties at

their last known address. We will tell you in the notice that the administrative law judge will not hold a hearing unless a party to the hearing requests that the hearing proceed. A request to proceed with the hearing must be made in writing within 30 days after the date the notice of the decision of the adjudication officer is mailed.

(2) *Effect of a decision by an adjudication officer.* A decision by an adjudication officer which is fully favorable to you under this section, and notification thereof, completes the administrative action on your request for hearing and is binding on all parties to the hearing and not subject to further review, unless—

(i) You or another party requests that the hearing continue, as provided in paragraph (c)(1) of this section;

(ii) The Appeals Council decides to review the decision on its own motion under the authority provided in § 404.969;

(iii) The decision is revised under the procedures explained in §§ 404.987 through 404.989; or

(iv) In a case remanded by a Federal court, the Appeals Council assumes jurisdiction under the procedures in § 404.984.

(3) *Fee for a representative's services.* The adjudication officer may authorize a fee for your representative's services if the adjudication officer makes a decision on your claim that is fully favorable to you, and you are represented. The actions of, and any fee authorization made by, the adjudication officer with respect to representation will be made in accordance with the provisions of subpart R of this part.

(d) *Who may be an adjudication officer.* The adjudication officer described in this section may be an employee of the Social Security Administration or a State agency that makes disability determinations for us.

[60 FR 47475, Sept. 13, 1995, as amended at 75 FR 33168, June 11, 2010]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE HEARING
PROCEDURES

§ 404.944 Administrative law judge hearing procedures—general.

A hearing is open to the parties and to other persons the administrative