

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING OFFICER

November 12, 2024

US TECH WORKERS ET AL.,)	
Complainant,)	
)	
)	
v.)	8 U.S.C. § 1324b Proceeding
)	OCAHO Case No. 2024B00104
)	
CHIME FINANCIAL, INC.)	
Respondent.)	
)	

Appearances: John Miano, Esq., for Complainant
Stephen H. Smalley, Esq., and Vanessa N. Garrido, Esq., for Respondent

ORDER DENYING MOTION TO CONSOLIDATE AND FOR LEAVE TO FILE A
CONSOLIDATED AMENDED COMPLAINT

I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

This case arises under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended, 8 U.S.C. § 1324b. Complainant, US Tech Workers, filed a complaint with the Office of the Chief Administrative Hearing Officer (OCAHO) on April 23, 2024. Complainant alleges that Respondent, Chime,¹ discriminated on the basis of citizenship, in violation of 8 U.S.C. § 1324b. Respondent filed its Answer and Affirmative Defenses on July 30, 2024.

On July 30, 2024, Complainant filed a Motion to Consolidate, Stay Discovery, and for Leave to File a Consolidated Amended Complaint to which Respondent filed a response on August 5, 2024. On August 8, 2024, this Court granted a limited stay of proceedings, staying discovery but permitting dispositive motions and cancelling the prehearing conference. *US Tech Workers v. Chime*, 20 OCAHO no. 1602 (2024).

¹ In its Answer, Respondent asserts that the proper name of the company is Chime Financial, Inc. The Court will interpret the filing as a motion to change the case caption and grants the motion.

II. POSITIONS OF THE PARTIES

Complainant seeks to consolidate all of the cases filed by US Tech Workers against forty firms that Complainant alleges “collectively engaged in a recruitment program they called ‘Chicago H-1B Connect’” which was a recruitment effort “specifically targeted at hiring non-immigrants in H-1B status” through a website, press releases, media interviews and social media. Mot. Cons. 2. Complainant asserts he filed a single charge against all the parties with the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section (IER), but IER asked him to file a separate charge against each respondent, and the right to sue letters were issued over a month and a half period. *Id.* at 2-3. Complainant states that the complaints involve the same facts, questions of law and concerted action and thus should be consolidated. *Id.* at 3. Complainant argues that “the question for this Court is whether a recruitment campaign like this, where employers band together to create a recruitment campaign to specifically hire H-1B aliens constitutes recruitment discrimination.” *Id.* at 4. He argues that this allegation is the same for all cases, and thus should be consolidated. *Id.* Further, while some complaints contain allegations that individuals made futile applications and other complaints do not, Complainant’s position is that these differences create no distinction among Respondents as this was a concerted action creating joint liability. *Id.* at 5.

Respondent argues that consolidation is not appropriate because there is a lack of commonality. Opp. to Consol. 2. Respondent argues that Complainant must satisfy its legal burden against each individual respondent, and whether Complainant can meet that burden will depend on the unique facts of each case. *Id.* at 2-3. Respondents are different, including their practices, policies, and personnel with respect to hiring, argues Respondent. *Id.* at 3. Second, the positions applied to, if any, are different. *Id.* Lastly, Respondent argues that consolidation will not be a matter of convenience and economy for the Court as there is no commonality among the parties, separate discovery and motion practice will occur by each respondent, and the defenses will be different. *Id.* at 3-4.

III. DISCUSSION

A. Consolidation

OCAHO’s regulations address consolidation in the context of hearings, and permit consolidation where “the same or substantially similar evidence is relevant and material to the matters at issue” in each hearing. 28 C.F.R. § 68.16. OCAHO Administration Law Judges (ALJs) have consolidated a number of cases when the cases involved common parties, issues, and/or witnesses. *See Guzman v. Yakima Fruit & Cold Storage*, 9 OCAHO no. 1063, 3 (2000) (collecting cases). “When considering whether to consolidate cases, courts often consider factors such as the interest of justice, expeditious results, conservation of resources, and avoiding inconsistent results, and conversely, whether consolidation would risk confusion, delay, or prejudice.” *United States v. Walmart Inc. (Bethlehem)*, 17 OCAHO no. 1475d, 8 (2023) (citing 8 Moore’s Federal Practice § 42.13) (Matthew Bender 3d Ed., 2024)).

Similarly, when federal courts address the issue of consolidation of cases, “the existence of common questions of law and fact is a prerequisite for any consolidation.” *Magnavox v. APF*

Electronics, Inc., 496 F. Supp. 29, 32 (N.D. Ill. 1980). If such common questions exist, it is then within the judge’s discretion to consolidate. *King v. Gen. Elec. Co.*, 960 F.2d 617, 626 (7th Cir. 1992). When exercising this discretion, district court judges have weighed factors like those analyzed by OCAHO ALJs: “judicial economy, avoiding delay, . . . avoiding inconsistent results[,] . . . the possibility of juror confusion or administrative difficulties.” *Habitat Educ. Center, Inc. v. Kimbell*, 250 F.R.D. 390, 394 (E.D. Wis. 2008) (citing 8 Moore’s Federal Practice §§ 42.10(4)(a), (5) (Mathew Bender 3d ed., 2024)).

The Complaint alleges that the Respondent is liable for discrimination on the basis of citizenship status in violation of 8 U.S.C. § 1324b. Compl. 21 ¶ 2.² The Complaints assigned to the undersigned are substantially similar with the exception that some allege that individual applications were made to the company, whereas others do not. The Answers filed in the cases differ substantially.³

Section 1324b provides, “[i]t is an unfair immigration-related employment practice for a person or other entity to discriminate against any individual ... with respect to the hiring, or recruitment or referral for a fee, of the individual for employment...because of such individual’s citizenship status.” 8 U.S.C. § 1324b(a)(1). In recruitment cases, OCAHO ALJs have applied the landmark case that provides the burden of proof analysis utilized in Title VII cases, *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792 (1973). See *Williams v. Lucas & Assocs.*, 2 OCAHO no. 357, 423, 428 (1991).

Thus, Complainant will have to first establish a prima facie case. Where the discrimination occurred in the recruitment process, OCAHO ALJs have required the individual to “(1) show [she] was a protected individual; (2) [she approached Respondent, a recruiting entity] and sought to apply for a position or be referred to an advertised position; (3) despite her qualifications she was not referred or considered; and (4) the Respondent [a recruiting entity] referred U.S. citizens and permanent resident for employment subsequent to the rejection of Complainant.” *United States Tech Workers et al. v. BMO Bank*, 20 OCAHO no. 1586b, 11 (2024), citing *United States v. Lasa Marketing Firms*, 1 OCAHO no. 141, 950, 965 n.15 (1990).⁴ Once a prima facie case is established, Respondent may articulate a legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason for the employment

² The undersigned was assigned seventeen cases filed by the United States Tech Workers, and fifteen remain pending. Thus I only have authority to consolidate the following OCAHO case numbers: 2024B00068, 2024B00069, 2024B00070, 2024B0071, 2024B00072, 2024B00074, 2024B00075, 2024B00084, 2024B00086, 2024B00100, 2024B00101, 2024B00102, 2024B00103, 2024B00104, 2024B00105.

³ For instance, the Answer in this case addressed each allegation and put forth twenty-eight defenses. The Respondent’s Answer in *United States Tech Workers v. Morningstar*, OCAHO no. 2024B00100, in contrast, generally denied the allegations and asserted two defenses.

⁴ The Administrative Law Judge in *Lasa Marketing* noted that active discouragement of an attempt to apply for a position based solely on citizenship status would be a prohibited employment practice under § 1324b. *Lasa Marketing Firms*, 1 OCAHO no. 141, at 971 n.21 (1990); *Williams v. Lucas & Assocs.*, 2 OCAHO no. 357, 423, 433.

action, and if it does, the Claimant must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the articulated reason was false and the respondent intentionally discriminated against the claimant. *See Reed v. Dupont Pioneer Hi-Bred Int'l, Inc.*, 13 OCAHO no. 1321a, 3 (2019).

These factors will require evidence unique to each employer to include each employer's involvement in "Chicago H-1B Connect," whether there was a job posting, the nature of the job posting, the experience required and whether the applicant, if there was one, was qualified, who else applied and whether they were qualified, the recruitment process, knowledge of the applicants' status, and the reasons for the hiring decisions. Presentation and analysis of a legitimate non-discriminatory reason will likely be different for each company as evidenced by the diversity of answers, and thus discovery will be related to all these factors and will be unique to each employer. *See King v. General Elec. Co.*, 960 F.2d 617, 626 (7th Cir. 1992)(denying motion to consolidate where there were different allegations and violations occurred at different times); *Mabry v. Village Mgmt., Inc.*, 109 F.R.D. 76, 80 (N.D. Ill. 1985) (denying motion to consolidate where the court found no common question of law and "no economies [were] likely to be achieved" by consolidation).

Further, consolidated proceedings would be unlikely to eliminate confusion or delay and result in judicial economy. The cases are in different procedural postures where some have pending motions to dismiss, and consolidation would delay progress on those that do not. A prehearing conference with all the cases and different counsel, or even with just the cases assigned to the undersigned, would likely be complicated and confusing, as would discovery and depositions, particularly as, again, the issues of law and fact are not common. This Court would need to ensure that each order accounts for the discreet issues raised by each company, a complex task.

B. Conspiracy

Complainant argues that the crux of the case is the conspiracy, and that the complaints together present one case of conspiracy to recruit based on citizenship status. Complainant appears to be proceeding under either a theory of civil conspiracy, where pursuant to an agreement between two or more actors to participate in an unlawful act, the injury caused by one of the parties creates liability for all, or joint liability, where, presumably, Complainant is alleging that each company acted in concert to produce a single injury. *See, e.g., Burlington N. & Santa Fe Ry. Co. v. United States*, 556 U.S. 599, 614 (2009) (citing Restatement (Second) of Torts, § 875 (1976)). Complainant cites to state law to support the statement that it has pled the elements of civil conspiracy. Mot. Consol. 5. Complainant has not cited, nor has the undersigned found, any cases applying civil conspiracy in OCAHO's proceedings. OCAHO only has the jurisdiction prescribed by Congress in its enabling statute, and a claim under § 1324b is a statutory claim, not a tort. *See Patel v. USCIS Boston*, 14 OCAHO no. 1353, 3 (2020); *BMO Bank*, 20 OCAHO no. 1586b, at 6 n. 7. *See also Great Am. Fed. Savings & Loan Ass'n v. Novotny*, 442 U.S. 366 (1979) (no cause of action under 28 U.S.C. § 1985(3) exists for conspiracy to violate Title VII).

C. Joint Liability

OCAHO has held entities jointly liable. *See United States v. Burns and Intra-Continental Ent.*, 5 OCAHO no. 759 (1995); *United States v. Tech. Marine Maint. And Gulf Coast Workforce*, 13

OCAHO 1312b (2018). In such cases, a complainant must establish liability as to each Respondent. *See, e.g., Fillmore v. Page*, 358 F.3d 496 (7th Cir. 2004) (“[j]oint liability is appropriate only where all of the defendants have committed the negligent or otherwise illegal act, and so only causation is at issue.”). However, the Complaint only asserts in a bald statement that concerted activity existed. Missing is how the companies acted in concert, such as what each entity’s agreements, financial ties, procedures for recruitment were with Chicago H-1B, and relationships among the employers and whether they were common to all. Or that there was a common injury, given the presence of individual applicants for some but not others, and a dearth of allegations regarding how the other individuals listed in the Complaints were injured. Given the lack of detail, the Court does not find that a common issue of fact or law has been presented by these cases.

D. Conclusion

At this early stage, the undersigned does not exercise her discretion to consolidate the fifteen cases filed by US Tech Workers assigned to her, and thus the Motion to Consolidate is DENIED. This is not to say that consolidation will never be appropriate; there may be instances as the litigation moves forward where consolidation might be appropriate, perhaps for certain limited purposes. As to Complainant’s Motion for Leave to File a Consolidated Amended Complaint, it appears Complainant was seeking solely to amend the Complaint to add the other cases. The Motion for Leave to File a Consolidated Amended Complaint is therefore DENIED.

SO ORDERED.

Dated and entered on November 12, 2024.

Honorable Jean C. King
Chief Administrative Law Judge