

Instructions For Claims Under the Age Discrimination In Employment Act

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8.0 ADEA Introductory Instruction

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Model

In this case the Plaintiff _____ has made a claim under the Federal Civil Rights statute that prohibits age discrimination against [an employee] [an applicant for employment], if that person is 40 years of age or older. This statute is known as the Age Discrimination in Employment Act or “ADEA.”

Specifically, [plaintiff] claims that [he/she] was [denied employment] [describe the employment action at issue] by the defendant _____ because of [plaintiff’s] age.

[Defendant] denies that [plaintiff] was discriminated against because of [his/her] age. Further, [defendant] asserts that [describe any affirmative defenses].

I will now instruct you more fully on the issues you must address in this case.

Comment

Referring to the parties by their names, rather than solely as “Plaintiff” and “Defendant,” can improve jurors’ comprehension. In these instructions, bracketed references to “[plaintiff]” or “[defendant]” indicate places where the name of the party should be inserted.

Neither Title VII nor Section 1981 prohibits employers from discriminating on grounds of age. In the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, however, Congress provided protection for employees age 40 or older who are the victims of discrimination because of age.¹ The central provision of the ADEA is 29 U.S.C. § 623, which provides in part as follows:

§ 623. Prohibition of age discrimination

(a) Employer practices. It shall be unlawful for an employer--

(1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual or otherwise discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual’s age;

(2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual’s age; or

(3) to reduce the wage rate of any employee in order to comply with this Act.

¹ In *Hildebrand v. Allegheny County*, 757 F.3d 99 (3d Cir. 2014), the Court of Appeals held that the ADEA displaces Section 1983 Equal Protection claims for age discrimination. *See id.* at 110 (“Congress intended the ADEA to be the exclusive remedy for claims of age discrimination in employment.”).

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1 In *Hill v. Borough of Kutztown*, 455 F.3d 225, 247 (3d Cir. 2006), the Court of Appeals set
2 forth the basic elements of an ADEA claim as follows:

3 To state a claim for age discrimination under the ADEA, a plaintiff must
4 allege that (1) he is over forty [*sic*], (2) he is qualified for the position in question,
5 (3) he suffered from an adverse employment decision, and (4) his replacement was
6 sufficiently younger to permit a reasonable inference of age discrimination.

7 The *Hill* court found that these standards were met where the 42-year-old plaintiff alleged that he
8 was constructively discharged from his job, for which he was qualified, and replaced by a person
9 who was 27. The court noted that “[c]onstructive discharge is an adverse employment decision
10 that may form the basis of an ADEA claim.” *Id.* at 247 n.32.

11 *Relationship Between the Coverage of the ADEA and Title VII*

12 The ADEA is patterned after Title VII (though the ADEA incorporates a number of the
13 enforcement and remedial provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act).² In some instances the
14 legal standards for determining discrimination under the ADEA are the same as those applicable
15 to Title VII. For example, in *Thurston v. TWA*, 469 U.S. 111, 121 (1985), the Court applied Title
16 VII precedent to conclude in an ADEA case that an employer may not apportion a benefit in a
17 discriminatory way even if it could have withheld the benefit in question altogether; the
18 *Thurston* Court stated that this principle “applies with equal force in the context of age
19 discrimination, for the substantive provisions of the ADEA ‘were derived in haec verba from Title
20 VII.’” *Lorillard v. Pons*, supra, [434 U.S. 575] at 584 [1978].” The *Thurston* Court also noted that
21 “[s]everal Courts of Appeals have recognized the similarity between the two statutes. In *Curay-*
22 *Cramer v. Ursuline Acad. of Wilmington, Del., Inc.*, 450 F.3d 130, 136 n.4 (3d Cir. 2006), for
23 example, the Court of Appeals stated “[w]e have previously recognized that Title VII and the Age
24 Discrimination in Employment Act (“ADEA”), 29 U.S.C. § 621 *et seq.* (2000), are comparable in
25 many contexts.” The Supreme Court rejected the use of the Title VII mixed-motive
26 framework for ADEA cases in *Gross v. FBL Financial Services, Inc.*, 557 U.S. 167, 176 (2009)
27 (“To establish a disparate-treatment claim under the plain language of the ADEA, therefore, a
28 plaintiff must prove that age was the “but-for” cause of the employer’s adverse decision.”). Thus,
29 unlike Chapter 5 – which provides separate instructions for “pretext” cases and “mixed-motive”
30 cases – Chapter 8 provides only one instruction for disparate treatment, because in all ADEA cases
31 the plaintiff always retains the burden to prove that age discrimination was the but-for cause of the
32 adverse employment action. See Comment 8.1.1.

33 There are a number of other important differences in the legal standards of ADEA and Title
34 VII. One example is that punitive damages are not available under the ADEA, as the statute

² See, e.g., *C.I.R. v. Schleier*, 515 U.S. 323, 325-26 (1995) (observing that “[t]he ADEA incorporates many of the enforcement and remedial mechanisms of the” FLSA, but also noting distinctions between the two statutory schemes), *superseded by statute on other grounds as noted in Eshelman v. Agere Sys., Inc.*, 554 F.3d 426, 441 (3d Cir. 2009); *Halle v. W. Penn Allegheny Health Sys. Inc.*, 842 F.3d 215, 224 n.8 (3d Cir. 2016) (observing that “the ADEA incorporates enforcement provisions of the FLSA, including the collective action provisions of 29 U.S.C. § 216(b)”).

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provides a substitute of “liquidated” (double) damages for “willful” violations. This difference and all others will be noted in the commentary to the individual ADEA instructions.

Admissibility of Evidence of Other Acts of Age Discrimination

In *Sprint/United Mgmt. Co. v. Mendelsohn*, 128 S. Ct. 1140 (2007), the Court provided guidance on how a trial court should treat evidence of “other acts” of age discrimination. The plaintiff argued that her employer had a company-wide policy discriminating against age, and proffered a number of instances in which other age-protected employees had suffered adverse job determinations. The trial court excluded this evidence on the ground that none of the instances involved the plaintiff’s immediate supervisors. The court of appeals took this as a ruling that “me-too” evidence was never relevant, i.e., as a *per se* rule of exclusion.

The Supreme Court agreed with the court of appeals that a *per se* rule of admissibility or inadmissibility of other acts of discrimination is not permissible, given that Fed. R. Evid. 403 requires the trial court to balance the probative value of evidence against the dangers of prejudice, confusion and delay. But the Court found it “not entirely clear” that the trial court in this case had in fact excluded the evidence under a *per se* rule. It remanded the case to allow the trial court “to conduct the relevant inquiry under the appropriate standard.” The Court noted that “[t]he question whether evidence of discrimination by other supervisors is relevant in an individual ADEA case is fact-based and depends on many factors, including how closely related the evidence is to the plaintiff’s circumstances and theory of the case” and that “[a]pplying Rule 403 to determine if evidence is prejudicial also requires a fact-intensive, context-specific inquiry.”

Ministerial Exception

With respect to claims for wrongful termination, the First Amendment’s religion clauses give rise to an affirmative defense that “bar[s] the government from interfering with the decision of a religious group to fire one of its ministers.” *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church & Sch. v. EEOC*, 565 U.S. 171, 181, 195 n.4 (2012). Though *Hosanna-Tabor* involved a retaliation claim under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Court’s broad description of the issue suggests that its recognition of a “ministerial exception” may apply equally to wrongful-termination claims brought under other federal anti-discrimination statutes. See *id.* at 196 (“The case before us is an employment discrimination suit brought on behalf of a minister, challenging her church’s decision to fire her.... [T]he ministerial exception bars such a suit.”). *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 140 S. Ct. 2049 (2020), in furthering refining which employees fall within this exception, applied this defense to an ADEA discrimination claim. For further discussion of the ministerial exception, see Comment 5.0.

Scope of Chapter

8.0 ADEA Introductory Instruction

1 These model instructions address the elements of ADEA claims and defenses; pertinent
2 definitions; and questions of damages. The commentary is designed to explain the drafting of the
3 model instructions and generally does not focus on other procedural matters.³

³ Administrative-exhaustion requirements provide one example. 29 U.S.C. § 626(d)(1) sets an administrative-exhaustion requirement for ADEA claims generally. 29 U.S.C. § 633a sets a different administrative-exhaustion framework for ADEA claims by federal employees. The Committee has not attempted to determine whether assessing compliance with these exhaustion requirements ever presents a task for the jury. Compare *Williams v. Runyon*, 130 F.3d 568, 573 (3d Cir. 1997) (evincing the view that a question of compliance with the exhaustion requirement set by 29 C.F.R. § 1614.105 for Title VII suits by federal employees could properly be submitted to the jury), with *Small v. Camden Cty.*, 728 F.3d 265, 269, 271 (3d Cir. 2013) (holding that compliance with the exhaustion requirement set by the Prison Litigation Reform Act presents a question that can be resolved by the judge). In the event that a dispute over exhaustion presents a jury question, the court may wish to submit relevant interrogatories to the jury. The Committee welcomes feedback from users of the model instructions concerning the need for, and appropriate nature of, model instructions on the topic of exhaustion.

8.1.1 Elements of an ADEA Claim— Disparate Treatment

Model

In this case [plaintiff] is alleging that [defendant] [describe alleged treatment] [plaintiff]. In order for [plaintiff] to recover on this discrimination claim against [defendant], [plaintiff] must prove that [defendant] intentionally discriminated against [plaintiff]. This means that [plaintiff] must prove that [his/her] age was a determinative factor in [defendant's] decision to [describe action] [plaintiff].

To prevail on this claim, [plaintiff] must prove the following by a preponderance of the evidence:

First: [Defendant] [failed to hire [plaintiff]] [failed to renew [plaintiff's] employment arrangement] [failed to promote [plaintiff]] [demoted [plaintiff]] [terminated [plaintiff]] [constructively discharged [plaintiff]] [or otherwise discriminated against [plaintiff] with respect to [plaintiff's] compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment]⁴; and

Second: such action resulted in harm to plaintiff; and

Third: [Plaintiff's] age was a determinative factor in [defendant's] decision.

Although [plaintiff] must prove that [defendant] acted with the intent to discriminate, [plaintiff] is not required to prove that [defendant] acted with the particular intent to violate [plaintiff's] federal civil rights. Moreover, [plaintiff] is not required to produce direct evidence of intent, such as statements admitting discrimination. Intentional discrimination may be inferred from the existence of other facts.

You should weigh all the evidence received in the case in deciding whether [defendant] intentionally discriminated against [plaintiff]. [For example, you have been shown statistics in this case. Statistics are one form of evidence that you may consider when deciding whether a defendant intentionally discriminated against a plaintiff. You should evaluate statistical evidence along with all the other evidence.]

[Defendant] has given a nondiscriminatory reason for its [describe defendant's action]. If you believe [defendant's] stated reason and if you find that the [adverse employment action] would have occurred because of defendant's stated reason regardless of [plaintiff's] age, then you must find for [defendant]. If you disbelieve [defendant's] stated reason for its conduct, then you may, but need not, find that [plaintiff] has proved intentional discrimination. In determining whether [defendant's] stated reason for its actions was a pretext, or excuse, for discrimination, you may not question [defendant's] business judgment. You cannot find intentional discrimination simply because you disagree with the business judgment of [defendant] or believe it is harsh or unreasonable. You are not to consider [defendant's] wisdom. However, you may consider whether [plaintiff] has proven that [defendant's] reason is merely a cover-up for discrimination.

⁴ Please see the Comment for discussion of this list of alternatives.

8.1.1 Disparate Treatment

1 Concluding instruction:

2 Ultimately, you must decide whether [plaintiff] has proven that [his/her] age was a
3 determinative factor in [defendant's employment decision.] "Determinative factor" means that if
4 not for the plaintiff's age, the [adverse employment action] would not have occurred.

5 In deciding whether age was a determinative factor, you must be careful to distinguish age
6 from other factors that are not dependent on age. [For example, if [defendant's] action was based
7 on [plaintiff's] seniority, this is not an age-dependent decision. A person's seniority is based on
8 time with the employer, and this is not the same factor as the person's age. Thus, an employer does
9 not violate the ADEA just by interfering with an older employee's benefits that would have vested
10 by virtue of the employee's years of service.]

11 Comment

12 "To establish a disparate-treatment claim under the plain language of the ADEA, ... a
13 plaintiff must prove that age was the 'but-for' cause of the employer's adverse decision." *Gross*
14 *v. FBL Financial Services, Inc.*, 557 U.S. 167, 176 (2009). Under *Gross*, the "mixed motive"
15 burden-shifting instruction that courts apply to some Title VII cases under *Price Waterhouse v.*
16 *Hopkins*, 490 U.S. 228 (1989), is unavailable in ADEA cases. Thus, this chapter contains no
17 analogue to Instruction 5.1.1.

18 Instruction 8.1.1 is modeled on Instruction 5.1.2's language concerning Title VII pretext
19 cases. The *Gross* Court stated that it "has not definitively decided whether the evidentiary
20 framework of *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792 ... (1973), utilized in Title VII
21 cases is appropriate in the ADEA context," *see Gross*, 557 U.S. at 175 n.2; *see also Reeves v.*
22 *Sanderson Plumbing Products, Inc.*, 530 U.S. 133, 142 (2000) ("This Court has not squarely
23 addressed whether the *McDonnell Douglas* framework, developed to assess claims brought under
24 § 703(a)(1) of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ... , also applies to ADEA actions. Because
25 the parties do not dispute the issue, we shall assume, arguendo, that the *McDonnell Douglas*
26 framework is fully applicable here."). The Court of Appeals has applied the *McDonnell Douglas*
27 framework in ADEA cases. *See e.g., Burton v. Teleflex Inc.*, 707 F.3d 417, 425-26 (3d Cir. 2013)
28 ("Because [plaintiff] has not provided direct evidence of discrimination, our inquiry under [the
29 ADEA and Title VII] is governed by the three-part framework established in *McDonnell*
30 *Douglas*");⁵ *Willis v. UPMC Children's Hosp. of Pittsburgh*, 808 F.3d 638, 644 (3d Cir. 2015)
31 ("Age discrimination claims in which the plaintiff relies on circumstantial evidence proceed

⁵ The U.S. Supreme Court recently reaffirmed the viability of the framework established in *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*. In *Ames v. Ohio Dep't of Youth Servs.*, 145 S. Ct. 1540, 1543 (2025), the Court resolved a circuit split as to whether, "a plaintiff who is a member of a majority group must also show 'background circumstances to support the decisions that the defendant is that unusual employer who discriminates against the majority.'" *Id.* The Court held that the *McDonnell Douglas* framework applies equally to all plaintiffs, regardless of whether the plaintiff is a majority or minority group member. *Id.* at 1548. Justice Thomas authored a concurrence and noted that he "would be willing to consider whether the *McDonnell Douglas* framework is a workable and useful evidentiary tool". *Id.* (Thomas, J., concurring) (criticizing the *McDonnell Douglas* framework as a "judge-made evidentiary tool").

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1 according to the three-part burden-shifting framework set forth in *McDonnell Douglas*); *cf. Smith*
2 *v. City of Allentown*, 589 F.3d 684, 691 (3d Cir. 2009) (“[T]he but-for causation standard required
3 by *Gross* does not conflict with our continued application of the *McDonnell Douglas* paradigm in
4 age discrimination cases.”).

5 “The elements of a *prima facie* case of age discrimination are that: (1) the plaintiff is at
6 least forty years old;⁶ (2) the plaintiff suffered an adverse employment decision; (3) the plaintiff
7 was qualified for the position in question; and (4) the plaintiff was ultimately replaced by another
8 employee who was sufficiently younger so as to support an inference of a discriminatory motive.”⁷
9 *Willis v. UPMC Children’s Hosp. of Pittsburgh*, 808 F.3d 638, 644 (3d Cir. 2015). But the test “is
10 not ‘intended to be rigid’”; “[w]here the plaintiff is not directly replaced, the fourth element is
11 satisfied if the plaintiff can provide facts which ‘if otherwise unexplained, are more likely than not
12 based on the consideration of impermissible factors.’” *Id.* (quoting *Pivrotto v. Innovative Sys.,*
13 *Inc.*, 191 F.3d 344, 352 (3d Cir. 1999) (quoting *Furnco Const. Corp. v. Waters*, 438 U.S. 567, 577
14 (1978))).⁸

⁶ Instruction 8.1.1 is drafted on the assumption that there is no dispute as to the first of these elements – namely, that the plaintiff was 40 or older at the time of the alleged adverse employment action. In the (likely rare) case where the defendant disputes whether the plaintiff was at least 40 at the time of the alleged adverse action, Instruction 8.1.1 should be revised to put that question to the jury as an element that the plaintiff must prove.

⁷ In *O’Connor v. Consolidated Coin Caterers Corp.*, 517 U.S. 308 (1996), the Court rejected the argument that an ADEA plaintiff in a discharge case must show that he was replaced by someone under 40. Under *O’Connor*, the question is whether the employer relied on age in making the challenged decision, not on whether the employer chose someone outside the protected class. The Court added, however, that an inference of age discrimination “cannot be drawn from the replacement of one worker with another insignificantly younger.” 517 U.S. at 313. *See also Maxfield v. Sinclair Int’l*, 766 F.2d 788, 792-93 (3d Cir. 1985) (“The probative value of the age of the replacement will depend on the circumstances of the case. Although replacement by someone younger, without more, will not give rise to an inference of age discrimination, it has been noted that a substantial difference in the ages may be circumstantial evidence that gives rise to that inference. [citing cases] If the difference in ages of the two employees were insignificant, the district court would likely find that the evidence was insufficient to permit an inference of discrimination.”). On the question of what is a substantial difference in age, *see, e.g., Sempier v. Johnson & Higgins*, 45 F.3d 724 (3d Cir. 1995) (noting that no particular age difference must be shown; citing cases holding that a five year difference was sufficient, and other case law indicating that a one year difference was insufficient to support an inference of age discrimination).

⁸ On the standards for proving age discrimination in reduction in force cases, *see, e.g., Tomasso v. Boeing Co.*, 445 F.3d 702, 706 n.4 (3d Cir. 2006):

Ordinarily, to make out a *prima facie* case [of age discrimination] the plaintiff must show . . . that he was replaced by a sufficiently younger person to create an inference of age discrimination. *Fakete v. Aetna, Inc.*, 308 F.3d 335, 338 (3d Cir. 2002). However, where an employee is terminated during a RIF, the [disputed

8.1.1 Disparate Treatment

1 If the plaintiff establishes a prima facie case of discrimination, the burden shifts to the
2 defendant to produce evidence of a legitimate nondiscriminatory reason for the challenged
3 employment action. *See St. Mary's Honor Center v. Hicks*, 509 U.S. 502, 506-07 (1993) (Title
4 VII case). "The legitimacy of the employer's proffered business justification will be affected both
5 by the duties and responsibilities of the employee's position and the nature of the justification.
6 Concomitantly, the significance of variations among an individual's personnel evaluations may
7 well depend upon the nature of the employee's responsibilities; a more exacting standard of
8 performance may have to be applied to positions of greater responsibility." *Healy v. New York Life*
9 *Ins. Co.*, 860 F.2d 1209, 1214 (3d Cir. 1988) (ADEA case).

10 If the defendant meets its burden of producing evidence of a nondiscriminatory reason for
11 its action,⁹ the plaintiff must persuade the jury that the defendant's stated reason was merely a
12 pretext for age discrimination, or in some other way prove it more likely than not that age
13 motivated the employer. *Texas Dept. of Community Affairs v. Burdine*, 450 U.S. 248, 253 (1981)
14 (Title VII case). The plaintiff retains the ultimate burden of proving intentional discrimination.
15 *Chipollini v. Spencer Gifts, Inc.*, 814 F.2d 893, 897 (3d Cir. 1987) (en banc) ("Under the ADEA,
16 the ultimate burden remains with the plaintiff to prove that age was a determinative factor in the
17 defendant employer's decision. The plaintiff need not prove that age was the employer's sole or
18 exclusive consideration, but must prove that age made a difference in the decision.").¹⁰ The

question] becomes whether the employer retained employees who do not belong to
the protected class.

See also Dreyer v. ARCO Chemical Co., 801 F.2d 651, 654 (3d Cir. 1986) (noting that in
reduction of force cases "it is often impracticable to require a plaintiff whose job has been
eliminated to show replacement"), *overruled on other grounds by Hazen Paper Co. v. Biggins*,
507 U.S. 604, 617 (1993); *Anderson v. CONRAIL*, 297 F.3d 242 (3d Cir. 2002) (in a reduction in
force case, the plaintiff must show that a similarly situated substantially younger employee was
retained).

⁹ The Committee has not attempted to draft an instruction for the (likely rare) case in which the
defendant fails to articulate any legitimate nondiscriminatory reason for the adverse employment
action. Regarding such cases, *see St. Mary's Honor Ctr. v. Hicks*, 509 U.S. 502, 509-10 & n.3
(1993) (stating that if the plaintiff presents evidence supporting the elements of the prima facie
case and the defendant fails to articulate a legitimate nondiscriminatory reason, then "[i]f the
finder of fact ... finds that the prima facie case is supported by a preponderance of the
evidence[,] it must find the existence of the presumed fact of unlawful discrimination and must,
therefore, render a verdict for the plaintiff").

¹⁰ *See also Burton v. Teleflex Inc.*, 707 F.3d 417, 427 (3d Cir. 2013) (ADEA and Title VII case)
("To make a showing of pretext, 'the plaintiff must point to some evidence, direct or
circumstantial, from which a factfinder could reasonably either (1) disbelieve the employer's
articulated legitimate reasons; or (2) believe that an invidious discriminatory reason was more
likely than not a motivating or determinative cause of the employer's action'" (quoting *Fuentes*
v. Perskie, 32 F.3d 759, 764 (3d Cir. 1994))). The second of these two numbered alternatives
was not at issue in *Burton*, because the court relied on the first alternative, holding that there was

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factfinder's rejection of the employer's proffered reason allows, but does not compel, judgment for the plaintiff. *Reeves v. Sanderson Plumbing Products, Inc.*, 530 U.S. 133, 147 (2000) ("In appropriate circumstances, the trier of fact can reasonably infer from the falsity of the explanation that the employer is dissembling to cover up a discriminatory purpose."). The employer's proffered reason can be shown to be pretextual by circumstantial as well as direct evidence. *Chipollini v. Spencer Gifts, Inc.*, 814 F.2d 893 (3d Cir. 1987) (en banc) (ADEA case). "To discredit the employer's proffered reason . . . the plaintiff cannot simply show that the employer's decision was wrong or mistaken, since the factual dispute at issue is whether discriminatory animus motivated the employer, not whether the employer is wise, shrewd, prudent or competent." *Keller v. Orix Credit Alliance, Inc.*, 130 F.3d 1101, 1109 (3d Cir. 1997) (ADEA case). See also *Tomasso v. Boeing Co.*, 445 F.3d 702, 707 (3d Cir. 2006) (ADEA case) (noting that the employee "need not always offer evidence sufficient to discredit all of the rationales advanced by the employer" because "the rejection of some explanations may so undermine the employer's credibility as to enable a rational factfinder to disbelieve the remaining rationales, even where the employee fails to produce evidence particular to those rationales.").

Miller v. Cigna Corp., 47 F.3d 586 (3d Cir. 1995) (en banc), was decided under the assumption that ADEA mixed-motive cases were governed by a framework distinct from that governing ADEA pretext cases. Obviously, that assumption is no longer good law after *Gross*, but the *Miller* court's discussion of the appropriate instruction for an ADEA pretext case remains instructive:

A plaintiff in an ADEA case who does not qualify for a burden shifting instruction under *Price Waterhouse* [i.e., a "mixed-motive" case] has the burden of persuading the trier of fact by a preponderance of the evidence that there is a "but-for" causal connection between the plaintiff's age and the employer's adverse action -- i.e., that age "actually played a role in [the employer's decisionmaking] process and had a determinative influence on the outcome" of that process.

evidence that would justify a factfinder in disbelieving the employer's stated reason. See *id.* at 431.

In *Willis v. UPMC Children's Hosp. of Pittsburgh*, 808 F.3d 638 (3d Cir. 2015), the Court of Appeals offered more detail concerning the second alternative: "Pointing to evidence demonstrating any of the following satisfies this second way to prove pretext: (1) the defendant previously discriminated against the plaintiff; (2) the defendant discriminated against others within the plaintiff's protected class; or (3) the defendant has treated similarly situated, substantially younger individuals more favorably." *Id.* at 645; see also *id.* at 649 (holding that the plaintiff "has not presented evidence that supports any of the three categories that would allow a factfinder to believe unlawful discrimination was more likely than not a motivating or determinative cause of her termination").

Although the *Burton* and *Willis* courts phrased the second alternative in terms that seem to permit a finding of liability based on proof that discrimination was "a motivating . . . cause," such an approach would appear to contravene the *Gross* Court's requirement of but-for causation.

8.1.1 Disparate Treatment

1 *Miller*, 47 F.3d at 596-97 (quoting *Hazen Paper Co. v. Biggins*, 507 U.S. 604, 610 (1993)). The
2 court in *Miller* reversed a verdict for the defendant because the trial judge instructed the jury that
3 age must be the “sole cause” of the employer’s decision. That standard was too stringent; instead,
4 in a pretext case, “plaintiff must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that age played a role
5 in the employer’s decisionmaking process and that it had a determinative effect on the outcome of
6 that process.”

7 *Adverse Employment Action*

8 As to the element of adverse employment action, the relevant statutory language in the
9 ADEA is materially similar to that in Title VII. The ADEA makes it “unlawful for an employer
10 ... to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual or otherwise discriminate against any
11 individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment,
12 because of such individual’s age.” 29 U.S.C. § 623(a); compare 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(1) (similar
13 provision in Title VII), which was construed in *Muldrow v. City of St. Louis*, 144 S. Ct. 967 (2024).
14 The Committee accordingly has drafted the adverse employment action element in Instruction
15 8.1.1 to parallel that in Instructions 5.1.1 and 5.1.2. See Comment 5.1.1 for further discussion of
16 the adverse employment action element in Title VII cases.

17 *Seniority Distinct From Age*

18 In *Hazen Paper Co. v. Biggins*, 507 U.S. 604, 611 (1993), the Court held that the ADEA
19 does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of an employee’s seniority, as distinct from age. In
20 *Hazen*, the employer fired the employee to prevent him from vesting in the pension plan. The Court
21 found that the employer’s action was not prohibited by the ADEA. The Court reasoned as follows:

22 [T]he ADEA commands that “employers are to evaluate [older] employees . . . on
23 their merits and not their age.” *Western Air Lines, Inc. v. Criswell*, 472 U.S. 400,
24 422 (1985). The employer cannot rely on age as a proxy for an employee’s
25 remaining characteristics, such as productivity, but must instead focus on those
26 factors directly.

27 When the employer’s decision is wholly motivated by factors other than
28 age, the problem of inaccurate and stigmatizing stereotypes disappears. This is true
29 even if the motivating factor is correlated with age, as pension status typically is. .
30 . . On average, an older employee has had more years in the work force than a
31 younger employee, and thus may well have accumulated more years of service with
32 a particular employer. Yet an employee’s age is analytically distinct from his years
33 of service. An employee who is younger than 40, and therefore outside the class of
34 older workers as defined by the ADEA, see 29 U.S.C. § 631(a), may have worked
35 for a particular employer his entire career, while an older worker may have been
36 newly hired. Because age and years of service are analytically distinct, an
37 employer can take account of one while ignoring the other, and thus it is incorrect
38 to say that a decision based on years of service is necessarily “age based.”

39 . . .

8.1.1 Disparate Treatment

We do not preclude the possibility that an employer who targets employees with a particular pension status on the assumption that these employees are likely to be older thereby engages in age discrimination. Pension status may be a proxy for age, not in the sense that the ADEA makes the two factors equivalent, but in the sense that the employer may suppose a correlation between the two factors and act accordingly. . . . Finally, we do not consider the special case where an employee is about to vest in pension benefits as a result of his age, rather than years of service, and the employer fires the employee in order to prevent vesting. That case is not presented here. Our holding is simply that an employer does not violate the ADEA just by interfering with an older employee’s pension benefits that would have vested by virtue of the employee’s years of service.

See also Kentucky Retirement Systems v. EEOC, 554 U.S. 135, 148 (2008) (“Where an employer adopts a pension plan that includes age as a factor, and that employer then treats employees differently based on pension status, a plaintiff, to state a disparate treatment claim under the ADEA, must adduce sufficient evidence to show that the differential treatment was ‘actually motivated’ by age, not pension status.”); *Bryan v. Gov’t of Virgin Islands*, 916 F.3d 242, 247, 249 (3d Cir. 2019) (holding that a territorial law “[r]equiring that long-tenured employees who declined to retire contribute 3% more of their salaries to the pension system each year ... did not discriminate based on age” because it was motivated by financial considerations and the criterion it employed – thirty years of service – was not “a direct proxy [that] could be masquerading as a factor other than age”). The pattern instruction advises the jury to distinguish between age-related discrimination and discrimination on other grounds that might correlate with age.

Discrimination on the Basis of Relative Youth

ADEA liability does not lie when a member of the protected class suffers discrimination because she is too young. In *General Dynamics Land Systems, Inc., v. Cline*, 540 U.S. 581 (2004), the employer retained health care benefits only for current employers who were older than 50. This meant that employees within the protected age class of 40-50 were disentitled. The Court rejected an ADEA claim, relying on legislative history indicating that Congress intended to protect older workers only; it did not prohibit favoring the old over the young. In sum, “ADEA protects only relatively older workers (over 40 [*sic*]) from discrimination favoring relatively younger ones (of any age).” Lewis & Norman, *Employment Discrimination Law and Practice* 428 (2d ed. 2004).

8.1.2 Elements of an ADEA Claim — Harassment — Hostile Work Environment — Tangible Employment Action

Model

[Plaintiff] claims that [he/she] was subjected to harassment by [names] and that this harassment was motivated by [plaintiff’s] age.

[Employer] is liable for the actions of [names] in plaintiff’s claim of harassment if [plaintiff] proves all of the following elements by a preponderance of the evidence:

8.1.2 Harassment – Hostile Work Environment – Tangible Employment Action

First: [Plaintiff] was subjected to [describe alleged conduct or conditions giving rise to plaintiff's claim] by [names].

Second: [Names] conduct was not welcomed by [plaintiff].

Third: [Names] conduct was motivated by the fact that [plaintiff] was [state plaintiff's age at the time of the alleged events giving rise to plaintiff's claim; must have been age 40 or older].

Fourth: The conduct was so severe or pervasive that a reasonable person in [plaintiff's] position would find [plaintiff's] work environment to be hostile or abusive. This element requires you to look at the evidence from the point of view of a reasonable person of [plaintiff's age]'s reaction to [plaintiff's] work environment.

Fifth: [Plaintiff] believed [his/her] work environment to be hostile or abusive as a result of [names] conduct.

Sixth: [Plaintiff] suffered an adverse “tangible employment action” as a result of the hostile work environment; a tangible employment action is defined as a significant change in employment status, such as hiring, firing, failing to promote, reassignment with significantly different responsibilities, or a decision causing significant change in benefits.

Comment

There is little Third Circuit case law on whether the ADEA prohibits harassment on the basis of age. *See Hildebrand v. Allegheny County*, 923 F.3d 128, 137 (3d Cir. 2019) (holding that the plaintiff “allege[d] sufficient facts to plausibly state an ADEA claim” where he “adequately allege[d] a hostile work environment, including page upon page of disparate treatment and adverse employment decisions based on his age[,] ... claim[ed] he was retaliated against for complaining about the negative treatment, and ... allege[d] his age was the motivation for his termination”). At least two other circuits have recognized ADEA age-harassment claims. *See Dediol v. Best Chevrolet, Inc.*, 655 F.3d 435, 441 (5th Cir. 2011) (holding that a plaintiff can state a “hostile work environment claim based on age discrimination under the ADEA” and enumerating the following elements: “(1) [plaintiff] was over [*sic*] the age of 40; (2) the employee was subjected to harassment, either through words or actions, based on age; (3) the nature of the harassment was such that it created an objectively intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment; and (4) there exists some basis for liability on the part of the employer”); *Crawford v. Medina Gen. Hosp.*, 96 F.3d 830, 834 (6th Cir. 1996) (“While, as far as we can discern, no circuit has as yet applied the hostile-environment doctrine in an ADEA action ... , we find it a relatively uncontroversial proposition that such a theory is viable under the ADEA.”). If the court wishes to provide a more detailed instruction on what constitutes a hostile work environment, such an instruction is provided in 8.2.1.

8.1.2 Harassment – Hostile Work Environment – Tangible Employment Action

1 It should be noted that constructive discharge is the adverse employment action that is most
2 common with claims of hostile work environment.¹¹ Instruction 8.2.2 provides an instruction
3 setting forth the relevant factors for a finding of constructive discharge. That instruction can be
4 used to amplify the term “adverse employment action” in appropriate cases.

5 The instruction’s definition of “tangible employment action” is taken from *Burlington*
6 *Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742, 761 (1998).

7 These ADEA instructions on harassment do not include a pattern instruction for quid pro
8 quo claims. This is because quid pro quo claims are almost invariably grounded in sex
9 discrimination, and the ADEA applies to age discrimination only. If an ADEA claim is ever raised
10 on quid pro quo grounds, the court can modify Instruction 5.1.3 for that occasion.

11 For further commentary on hostile work environment claims, see the Comment to
12 Instruction 5.1.4.

¹¹ As Comment 8.1.3 notes (by analogy to the framework for Title VII hostile environment claims) the employer may raise an affirmative defense under *Faragher v. Boca Raton*, 524 U.S. 775 (1998), and *Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742 (1998), if no tangible employment action has been taken against the plaintiff. In *Pennsylvania State Police v. Suders*, 542 U.S. 129, 140-41 (2004), the Court addressed the question of constructive discharge in a Title VII case, holding “that an employer does not have recourse to the *Ellerth/ Faragher* affirmative defense when a supervisor’s official act precipitates the constructive discharge; absent such a ‘tangible employment action,’ however, the defense is available to the employer whose supervisors are charged with harassment.” Assuming that the same approach applies in ADEA cases, Instruction 8.1.2 is appropriate for use in cases where the evidence supports a claim that the constructive discharge resulted from an official act or acts. However, where the constructive discharge did not result from an official act, an affirmative defense is available to the employer and Instruction 8.1.3 should be used instead.

8.1.3 Harassment – Hostile Work Environment – No Tangible Employment Action

8.1.3 Elements of an ADEA Claim — Harassment — Hostile Work Environment — No Tangible Employment Action

Model

[Plaintiff] claims that [he/she] was subjected to harassment by [names] and that this harassment was motivated by [plaintiff's] age.

[Employer] is liable for the actions of [names] in [plaintiff's] claim of discriminatory harassment if [plaintiff] proves all of the following elements by a preponderance of the evidence:

First: [Plaintiff] was subjected to [describe alleged conduct or conditions giving rise to plaintiff's claim] by [names].

Second: [Names] conduct was not welcomed by [plaintiff].

Third: [Names] conduct was motivated by the fact that [plaintiff] was [state plaintiff's age at the time of the alleged events giving rise to plaintiff's claim; must have been age 40 or older].

Fourth: The conduct was so severe or pervasive that a reasonable person in [plaintiff's] position would find [plaintiff's] work environment to be hostile or abusive. This element requires you to look at the evidence from the point of view of a reasonable person of [plaintiff's age]'s reaction to [plaintiff's] work environment.

Fifth: [Plaintiff] believed [his/her] work environment to be hostile or abusive as a result of [names] conduct.

[For use when the alleged harassment is by non-supervisory employees:

Sixth: Management level employees knew, or should have known, of the abusive conduct and failed to take prompt and adequate remedial action. You can find that management level employees should have known of the abusive conduct if 1) an employee provided management level personnel with enough information to raise a probability of age harassment in the mind of a reasonable employer, or if 2) the harassment was so pervasive and open that a reasonable employer would have had to be aware of it.]

[In the event this Instruction is given, omit the following instruction regarding the employer's liability.]

If any of the above elements has not been proved by a preponderance of the evidence, your verdict must be for [defendant] and you need not proceed further in considering this claim. If you find that the elements have been proved, then you must further consider whether the employer is liable for such conduct. An employer may be liable for the actions of its supervisors as I will describe.

[Give instruction (A) when the facts permit a finding either of proxy liability or of presumptive liability subject to an affirmative defense. When the alleged individual harasser

8.1.3 Harassment – Hostile Work Environment – No Tangible Employment Action

is not highly enough placed to create a triable issue of proxy liability, give only instruction (B).]

(A.) An employer is liable when the [individual harasser's *name*] is plaintiff's supervisor and either highly placed enough to be the proxy of the employer or, absent that, when the employer has failed to make out the affirmative defense.

With respect to proxy liability, the employer is strictly liable for the conduct of [name] if [name] is highly enough placed within the employer's hierarchy such as that [his/her] conduct is deemed that of the employer. To do so, [name] must exercise exceptional authority and control within the employer but need not be its chief executive officer. In making this determination, you may look at the employer's formal institutional structure, evidence of how decision-making in fact occurs on a day-to-day basis, and any other evidence you find establishes exceptional authority and control.

If you find proxy liability, the employer is liable for the harassment. If you find no proxy liability, the employer is still liable unless it has established an affirmative defense. I will instruct you now on the elements of that affirmative defense.

(B). If any of the above elements has not been proved by a preponderance of the evidence, your verdict must be for [defendant] and you need not proceed further in considering this claim. If you find that the elements have been proved, then you must consider whether [name] is the plaintiff's supervisor. If you so find, you must find for plaintiff unless you also find that the [employer] has proven an affirmative defense by a preponderance of the evidence. I will instruct you now on the elements of that affirmative defense.

You must find for [defendant] if you find that [defendant] has proved both of the following elements by a preponderance of the evidence:

First: That [defendant] exercised reasonable care to prevent harassment in the workplace on the basis of age, and also exercised reasonable care to promptly correct any harassing behavior that does occur.

Second: That [plaintiff] unreasonably failed to take advantage of any preventive or corrective opportunities provided by [defendant].

Proof of the following facts will be enough to establish the first element that I just referred to, concerning prevention and correction of harassment:

1. [Defendant] had established an explicit policy against harassment in the workplace on the basis of age.

2. That policy was fully communicated to its employees.

3. That policy provided a reasonable way for [plaintiff] to make a claim of harassment to higher management.

8.1.3 Harassment – Hostile Work Environment – No Tangible Employment Action

1 4. Reasonable steps were taken to correct the problem, if raised by [plaintiff].

2 On the other hand, proof that [plaintiff] did not follow a reasonable complaint procedure
3 provided by [defendant] will ordinarily be enough to establish that [plaintiff] unreasonably failed
4 to take advantage of a corrective opportunity.

5 6 **Comment**

7 Caselaw supporting the availability of hostile-work-environment claims under the ADEA
8 is discussed in Comment 8.1.2.

9 This instruction is substantively identical to Instruction 5.1.5, covering hostile work
10 environment claims with no tangible employment action under Title VII. Like Title VII — and
11 unlike Section 1981 — the ADEA regulates employers only, and not individual employees.
12 Therefore, the instruction is written in terms of employer liability for the acts of its employees.

13 This instruction is to be used in discriminatory harassment cases where the plaintiff did
14 not suffer any “tangible” employment action such as discharge or demotion, but rather suffered
15 “intangible” harm flowing from harassment that is “sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a
16 hostile work environment.” *Faragher v. Boca Raton*, 524 U.S. 775, 808 (1998). In *Faragher* and
17 in *Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742 (1998), the Court held that an employer is
18 strictly liable for supervisor harassment that “culminates in a tangible employment action, such as
19 discharge, demotion, or undesirable reassignment.” *Ellerth*, 524 U.S. at 765. But when no such
20 tangible action is taken, the employer may still be liable for harassment by supervisors. Such
21 liability arises in two situations. The first is when the supervisor in question is highly enough
22 placed within the institutional employer to be its “proxy” or “alter ego.” The second is where the
23 employer fails to establish an affirmative defense to the presumptive liability that arises from
24 supervisory harassment even when there is no tangible employment action.

25
26 In *O’Brien v. Middle E. Forum*, 57 F.4th 110 (3d Cir. 2023), the Court of Appeals “now
27 join[s] our sister Circuit Courts of Appeals and hold[s] that the *Faragher/Ellerth* defense is
28 unavailable when the alleged harasser is the employer’s proxy or alter ego.” *Id.* at 120. The opinion
29 used the two terms interchangeably, but the model instruction uses only “proxy” for the sake of
30 simplicity. As for what suffices to satisfy this standard, the rationale for liability is that the
31 institutional employer is itself acting when the harassing conduct is by a proxy or alter ego. Thus,
32 while “merely serving as a supervisor with some amount of control over a subordinate does not
33 establish proxy status,” such status can be found “where ‘an official... [is] high enough in the
34 management hierarchy that his actions ‘speak’ for the employer.’” *O’Brien* cautioned that “only
35 individuals with exceptional authority and control within an organization” can meet this standard.
36 57 F.4th at 121 (quoting *Helm v. Kansas*, 656 F.3d 1277, 1286 (10th Cir. 2011)).

37
38 In *O’Brien*, the alleged harasser was Gregg Roman, plaintiff’s direct supervisor. The
39 Court found wrote:
40

8.1.3 Harassment – Hostile Work Environment – No Tangible Employment Action

1 Roman served as the Chief Operating Officer, Director, and Secretary of the Board.
2 The jury heard testimony that . . . he was second in command at the Forum, and
3 was poised to “be the successor to become president of the organization.” There
4 was testimony that his job was to “run[] the administration” of the organization;
5 he was the “man in charge” of dictating policies for the day-to-day governance of
6 the Forum’s main Philadelphia office, and he was “responsible for all of the
7 administration oversight with anybody that worked at the Forum.” The jury also
8 heard testimony about his public-facing role which included making media
9 appearances on behalf of the Forum.

10 *O’Brien*, 57 F.4th at 121-22 (citations omitted). The model instructions look to this paragraph to
11 frame the evidence that may be relevant to the proxy decision in terms of institutional structure,
12 day-to-day operations, and other evidence.

13 If proxy liability is not established, an employer may still be liable for supervisor
14 harassment even when no tangible employment action is taken. Such liability arises from the
15 harassing actions of a supervisor unless the employer establishes an affirmative defense. To prevail
16 on the basis of the defense, the employer must prove that “(a) [it] exercised reasonable care to
17 prevent and correct promptly any sexually harassing behavior,” and that (b) the employee
18 “unreasonably failed to take advantage of any preventive or corrective opportunities provided by
19 the employer or to avoid harm otherwise.” *Ellerth*, 524 U.S. at 751 (1998).

20 When the alleged harassment is carried out by non-supervisory employees, there is
21 necessarily no tangible employment action. The affirmative defense provided by *Ellerth* does not
22 apply. In order to protect the employer from unwarranted liability for the discriminatory acts of its
23 non-supervisor employees¹², the plaintiff must prove an additional element. Respondeat superior
24 liability for the acts of non-supervisory employees exists only where “the defendant knew or
25 should have known of the harassment and failed to take prompt remedial action.” *Andrews v. City*
26 *of Philadelphia*, 895 F.2d 1469, 1486 (3d Cir. 1990). The Sixth element of Instruction 8.1.3 reflects
27 this requirement.

28 If the court wishes to provide a more detailed instruction on what constitutes a hostile work
29 environment, such an instruction is provided in 8.2.1.

30 These ADEA instructions on harassment do not include a pattern instruction for quid pro
31 quo claims. This is because quid pro quo claims are almost invariably grounded in sex

¹² In the context of Title VII claims, the Supreme Court has held that “an employee is a ‘supervisor’ for purposes of vicarious liability . . . if he or she is empowered by the employer to take tangible employment actions against the victim.” *Vance v. Ball State University*, 570 U.S. 421, 424 (2013). For further discussion of *Vance*, see Comment 5.1.5.

8.1.3 Harassment – Hostile Work Environment – No Tangible Employment Action

1 discrimination, and the ADEA applies to age discrimination only. If an ADEA claim is ever raised
2 on quid pro quo grounds, the court can modify Instruction 5.1.3 for that occasion.

3 For further commentary on hostile work environment claims, see Instructions 5.1.4 and
4 5.1.5.

8.1.4 Elements of an ADEA Claim–Disparate Impact

Model

In this case, [plaintiff] claims that [defendant], by [describe employment practice], has caused an adverse, disproportionate impact on persons [40] years of age or older. The parties agree that [defendant’s] conduct is neutral on its face, but [plaintiff] contends that in fact people [40] and older have been treated more harshly by [defendant]. This is what is known in the law as “disparate impact.”

To find a disparate impact, you do not need to consider whether [defendant] intended to discriminate against persons [40] and older. You must focus on the consequences or results of specific employment practices.

To recover on [his/her] claim of disparate impact, [plaintiff] must prove both of the following by a preponderance of the evidence.

First: [Defendant] has engaged in a specific employment practice or practices that caused [defendant] to [fail to hire]¹³ [fail to promote] [demote] [terminate] [constructively discharge][plaintiff] because [plaintiff] was [[40] or older].

Second: [Defendant’s] [describe employment practice] had a significantly disproportionate adverse impact on persons [40] years of age or older.

Note that it is not enough for [plaintiff] to prove that workers [40] and older have suffered a disparate impact. Nor is it enough to allege that some generalized policy is responsible for a disparate impact. Instead, [plaintiff] must prove that a specific employment practice or practices caused the disproportionate adverse impact on persons [40] years of age or older.

[Affirmative Defense:

[Defendant] contends that [describe employment practice] was based on reasonable factors other than age. [Defendant] has the burden of proving each of the following elements by a preponderance of the evidence:

First: [Describe employment practice] is based on factors other than the age of [the plaintiff] [those similarly situated];

Second: [Insert justification for factors] is a legitimate interest of the defendant’s business; and

Third: [Describe employment practice] is reasonably related to achieving [insert justification for factors].

¹³ The Third Circuit has not taken a position as to whether the disparate impact theory is available to challenge hiring discrimination.

8.1.4 Disparate Impact

If you find that [plaintiff] has proved each of the elements on which [he/she] has the burden of proof, your verdict should be for [plaintiff], unless you also find that [defendant] has proved this affirmative defense, in which event your verdict should be for [defendant].]

Comment

Right to Jury Trial

Unlike Title VII, the ADEA provides a right to jury trial for all claims covered by the Act, including, now, disparate impact claims. *See* 29 U.S.C. § 626(c)(2) (“[A] person shall be entitled to a trial by jury of any issue of fact in any [ADEA] action . . . regardless of whether equitable relief is sought by any party in such action.”).

Comparison to Disparate Treatment Claims

An ADEA plaintiff may claim either disparate treatment or disparate impact. As discussed in Comment 8.1.1, a disparate-treatment claim seeks to show intentional discrimination – i.e., that “age was the ‘reason’ that the employer decided to act.” *Gross v. FBL Fin. Servs., Inc.*, 557 U.S. 167, 176 (2009). By contrast, a plaintiff bringing a disparate-impact claim need not show intent to discriminate. Under a disparate-impact theory, “an employer who classifies his employees without respect to age may still be liable . . . if such classification adversely affects the employee because of that employee’s age.” *Meacham v. Knolls Atomic Power Lab.*, 554 U.S. 84, 95-96 (2008) (internal quotation marks omitted).

Comparison to Title VII Disparate Impact Claims

In *Smith v. City of Jackson*, 544 U.S. 228 (2005), the Court held that the ADEA authorizes recovery on disparate impact claims, comparable to the claim established in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424 (1971), which announced a disparate impact theory of recovery in Title VII cases. The Court observed, however, that the disparate impact ground of recovery in the ADEA is narrower than that provided in Title VII, in two respects. First, the ADEA permits a disparate impact “where the differentiation is based on reasonable factors other than age.” 29 U.S.C. § 623(f)(1). Second, the 1991 amendment to Title VII modified the Supreme Court’s holding in *Wards Cove Packing v. Atonio*, 490 U.S. 642 (1989), in which the Court narrowly construed the employer’s exposure to disparate-impact liability under Title VII. Because the 1991 amendment did not affect the ADEA, it follows that the standards of *Wards Cove* remain applicable to disparate impact actions under the ADEA. Under *Wards Cove*, “it is not enough to simply allege that there is a disparate impact on workers, or point to a generalized policy that leads to such an impact. Rather, the employee is responsible for isolating and identifying the *specific* employment practices that are allegedly responsible for any observed statistical disparities.” *Smith v. Jackson*, 544 U.S. at 235 (emphasis in original); *see also Karlo v. Pittsburgh Glass Works, LLC*, 849 F.3d 61, 70 (3d Cir. 2017) (“Congress stripped that requirement from Title VII when it amended the statute in 1991, but it remains operative under the ADEA.”) (citing *Smith*, 544 U.S. at 240).

Prima Facie Case

8.1.4 Disparate Impact

1 “To state a *prima facie* case for disparate impact under the ADEA, a plaintiff must (1)
2 identify a specific, facially neutral policy, and (2) proffer statistical evidence that the policy caused
3 a significant age-based disparity.” *Karlo v. Pittsburgh Glass Works, LLC*, 849 F.3d 61, 69 (3d Cir.
4 2017). The age-based disparity may be shown by comparing the effects on 40-and-older workers
5 to those on younger-than-40 workers,¹⁴ or by using a dividing line higher than 40 years of age
6 (e.g., by comparing the effects on 50-and-older workers to those on younger-than-50 workers). *See*
7 *Karlo*, 849 F.3d at 72 (“A specific, facially neutral policy that significantly disfavors employees
8 over fifty years old supports a claim of disparate impact under the plain text of § 623(a)(2).”).¹⁵

9 *Affirmative Defense for Reasonable Factors Other Than Age*

10 A facially-age-neutral practice that disparately affects older workers is not barred by the
11 ADEA “where the differentiation is based on reasonable factors other than age.” 29 U.S.C.
12 § 623(f)(1). The Supreme Court has distinguished this “reasonable factors other than age”
13 (“RFOA”) defense from a business-necessity defense. For example, in *Smith v. City of Jackson*,
14 544 U.S. 228 (2005), the Court affirmed the dismissal of the plaintiffs’ disparate-impact claims,
15 reasoning that “the City’s decision to grant a larger raise to lower echelon employees for the
16 purpose of bringing salaries in line with that of surrounding police forces was a decision based on
17 a ‘reasonable facto[r] other than age’ that responded to the City’s legitimate goal of retaining police
18 officers.” *Smith*, 544 U.S. at 242. The Court explained: “While there may have been other
19 reasonable ways for the City to achieve its goals, the one selected was not unreasonable. Unlike
20 the business necessity test, which asks whether there are other ways for the employer to achieve
21 its goals that do not result in a disparate impact on a protected class, the reasonableness inquiry
22 includes no such requirement.” *Id.* at 243.¹⁶ A few years later, in the course of explaining its
23 holding that the RFOA defense is an affirmative defense on which the defendant bears the burdens
24 of both production and persuasion, *see Meacham v. Knolls Atomic Power Lab.*, 554 U.S. 84, 87
25 (2008), the Court declared itself “satisfied that the business necessity test should have no place in
26 ADEA disparate-impact cases,” *id.* at 97. The Court of Appeals has described the defendant’s task
27 (with respect to the RFOA defense) as a “relatively light burden.” *Bryan v. Gov’t of Virgin*
28 *Islands*, 916 F.3d 242, 248-49 (3d Cir. 2019) (rejecting a disparate-impact ADEA challenge to a
29 territorial law “[r]equiring that long-tenured employees who declined to retire contribute 3% more
30 of their salaries to the pension system each year” on the ground that the law “reasonably targets

¹⁴ *See* 29 U.S.C. § 631(a) (“The prohibitions in this chapter shall be limited to individuals who are at least 40 years of age.”).

¹⁵ This “subgroup” approach to ADEA disparate-impact claims works for “subgroups with ‘lower boundaries,’ not ‘upper boundaries.’” *Karlo*, 849 F.3d at 77. Thus, for example, the approach would not permit comparison of the impact on “a ‘banded’ 50-to-55 subgroup” to the impact on those outside the banded subgroup. *Id.* (noting that “the ADEA protects only ‘relatively old worker[s] from discrimination that works to the advantage of the relatively young’” (quoting *Gen. Dynamics Land Sys., Inc. v. Cline*, 540 U.S. 581, 590–91 (2004))).

¹⁶ *See also Karlo*, 849 F.3d at 84 (“When a defendant proffers a RFOA, the plaintiff can rebut it by showing that *the factor relied upon* is unreasonable, not by identifying twenty *other* practices that would have been reasonable instead.”).

8.1.4 Disparate Impact

- 1 long-tenured employees with higher salaries—not all older workers—to encourage them to retire
- 2 from the Government payroll and to pay more into the pension system”).

8.1.5 Elements of an ADEA Claim — Retaliation

Model

[Plaintiff] claims that [defendant] discriminated against [him/her] because of [plaintiff's] [describe protected activity].

To prevail on this claim, [plaintiff] must prove all of the following by a preponderance of the evidence:

First: [Plaintiff] [describe activity protected by the ADEA].

Second: [Plaintiff] was subjected to a materially adverse action at the time, or after, the protected conduct took place.

Third: There was a causal connection between [describe challenged activity] and [plaintiff's] [describe plaintiff's protected activity].

Concerning the first element, [plaintiff] need not prove the merits of [his/her] [describe plaintiff's activity], but only that [he/she] was acting under a reasonable,¹⁷ good faith belief that [plaintiff's] [or someone else's] rights under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act were violated.

Concerning the second element, the term “materially adverse” means that [plaintiff] must show [describe alleged retaliatory activity] was serious enough that it well might have discouraged a reasonable worker from [describe plaintiff's protected activity]. [The activity need not be related to the workplace or to [plaintiff's] employment.]

Concerning the third element, that of causal connection, that connection may be shown in many ways. For example, you may or may not find that there is a sufficient connection through timing, that is [defendant's] action followed shortly after [defendant] became aware of [plaintiff's] [describe activity]. Causation is, however, not necessarily ruled out by a more extended passage of time. Causation may or may not be proven by antagonism shown toward [plaintiff] or a change in demeanor toward [plaintiff].

Ultimately, you must decide whether [plaintiff's] [protected activity] had a determinative effect on [describe alleged retaliatory activity]. “Determinative effect” means that if not for [plaintiff's] [protected activity], [describe alleged retaliatory activity] would not have occurred.

Comment

The ADEA provides a cause of action for retaliation:

¹⁷ See the Comment for a discussion of the allocation of responsibility for determining the reasonableness of the plaintiff's belief.

8.1.5 Retaliation

(d) Opposition to unlawful practices; participation in investigations, proceedings, or litigation. It shall be unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any of his employees or applicants for employment, for an employment agency to discriminate against any individual, or for a labor organization to discriminate against any member thereof or applicant for membership, because such individual, member or applicant for membership has opposed any practice made unlawful by this section, or because such individual, member or applicant for membership has made a charge, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or litigation under this Act.

29 U.S.C. § 623(d). This section applies to protect employees in the private sector; the ADEA provision covering federal employees, *see* 29 U.S.C. §633a(a), does not contain an explicit provision on retaliation. However, the Supreme Court in *Gomez-Perez v. Potter*, 128 S. Ct. 1931, 1943 (2008), held “that § 633a(a) prohibits retaliation against a federal employee who complains of age discrimination.”

The substantive standards for a retaliation claim under the ADEA are generally the same as those applied to Title VII retaliation claims. Lewis and Norman, *Employment Discrimination* 453 (2d ed. 2004) (“Section 623(d) of ADEA provides protection against retaliation in the same terms as § 704(a) of Title VII.”) ; *Daniels v. Sch. Dist. of Philadelphia*, 776 F.3d 181, 192 (3d Cir. 2015) (addressing retaliation claims under Title VII, the ADEA, and the Pennsylvania Human Rights Act “together[,] as the circumstances of this case do not require that we make differing analyses”).

Protected Activity

The most common activities protected from retaliation under the ADEA and Title VII are: 1) opposing or complaining about discrimination;¹⁸ 2) making a charge of employment discrimination; 3) testifying, assisting or participating in any manner in an investigation, proceeding or hearing under the ADEA. See the discussion of protected activity in the Comment to Instruction 5.1.7. *See also Fasold v. Justice*, 409 F.3d 178, 188 (3d Cir. 2005) (filing a complaint with the EEOC is protected activity); *Robinson v. City of Pittsburgh*, 120 F.3d 1286, 1299 (3d Cir. 1997) (filing discrimination complaint constitutes protected activity), *overruled on other grounds by Burlington N. & S.F. Ry. Co. v. White*, 548 U.S. 53 (2006); *Kachmar v. Sungard Data Sys., Inc.*, 109 F.3d 173, 177 (3d Cir. 1997) (advocating equal treatment was protected activity); *Aman v. Cort Furniture*, 85 F.3d 1074, 1085 (3d Cir. 1989) (under Title VII’s anti-retaliation provision

¹⁸ Where an employer conditioned its conversion of terminated at-will employees into independent contractors on the employees’ signing releases of all existing claims (including but not limited to discrimination claims), an employee’s refusal to sign that release did not constitute opposition within the meaning of the ADEA’s anti-retaliation provision: “[R]efusing to sign a release ... does not communicate opposition sufficiently specific to qualify as protected employee activity.... Because Allstate’s Release barred its signatories from bringing *any* claims against Allstate concerning their employment or termination, employee agents who refused to sign it might have done so for any number of reasons unrelated to discrimination.” *E.E.O.C. v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 778 F.3d 444, 452 (3d Cir. 2015).

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“a plaintiff need not prove the merits of the underlying discrimination complaint, but only that ‘he was acting under a good faith, reasonable belief that a violation existed.’” (quoting *Griffiths v. CIGNA Corp.*, 988 F.2d 457, 468 (3d Cir. 1993) (quoting *Sumner v. United States Postal Service*, 899 F.2d 203, 209 (2d Cir. 1990)), *overruled on other grounds by Miller v. CIGNA Corp.*, 47 F.3d 586 (3d Cir. 1995))).

In accord with instructions from other circuits, Instruction 8.1.5 directs the jury to determine both the good faith and the reasonableness of the plaintiff’s belief that employment discrimination had occurred. See Seventh Circuit Committee Comment to Instruction 3.02 (2017) (noting that, where contested in Title VII, § 1981, and ADEA cases, plaintiff must show protected activity was based on “reasonable, good faith belief [of discrimination]”); Eleventh Circuit Instruction 4.22 (2024) (noting that action is protected if based on plaintiff’s “good-faith, reasonable belief” that defendant discriminated based on protected trait for claims under Section 1981, Title VII, ADEA, ADA, and FLSA); Eighth Circuit Instruction 10.41 (2023) (stating plaintiff must show “plaintiff reasonably believed” there was harassment in Title VII, ADEA, ADA, and FMLA cases); *id.* Notes on Use, Note 5 (“employees are protected [under Title VII, ADEA, ADA, FMLA, and others] if they opposed an employment practice that they reasonably and in good faith believe to be unlawful.”)); *cf.* Fifth Circuit Committee Note to Instruction 11.5 (2020) (noting plaintiff must “prove that he or she had a reasonable good-faith belief that the practice was unlawful under Title VII” to prove Title VII retaliation); *id.* Instruction 11.7 (citing Instruction 11.5 in ADEA—Retaliation instruction); Ninth Circuit Instruction & Comment 10.8 (2024) (discussing reasonable belief requirement in comment but not in the model Title VII instruction); *id.* Comment 11.3 (adopting Title VII instruction 10.8 for ADEA claims).

Standard for Actionable Retaliation

The Supreme Court in *Burlington N. & S.F. Ry. v. White*, 548 U.S. 53, 68 (2006), held that a cause of action for retaliation under Title VII lies whenever the employer responds to protected activity in such a way “that a reasonable employee would have found the challenged action materially adverse, which in this context means it well might have dissuaded a reasonable worker from making or supporting a charge of discrimination.” (internal quotation marks and citations omitted).¹⁹ The Court elaborated on this standard in the following passage:

We speak of *material* adversity because we believe it is important to separate significant from trivial harms. Title VII, we have said, does not set forth

¹⁹ Where an employer terminated at-will employees but offered them a chance to serve as independent contractors if they signed releases of all existing claims (including but not limited to discrimination claims), the employer’s denial of the independent-contractor arrangement to terminated employees who refused to sign that release did not constitute an adverse action for purposes of the ADEA’s anti-retaliation provision. *E.E.O.C. v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 778 F.3d 444, 452 (3d Cir. 2015) (“[T]he terminated agents were not entitled to convert to independent contractor status.... And the [EEOC] has cited no legal authority for the proposition that an employer commits an adverse action by denying an employee an unearned benefit on the basis of the employee’s refusal to sign a release.”).

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1 “a general civility code for the American workplace.” *Oncale v. Sundowner*
2 *Offshore Services, Inc.*, 523 U.S. 75, 80, 118 S. Ct. 998, 140 L. Ed. 2d 201 (1998).
3 An employee’s decision to report discriminatory behavior cannot immunize that
4 employee from those petty slights or minor annoyances that often take place at work
5 and that all employees experience. See 1 B. Lindemann & P. Grossman,
6 *Employment Discrimination Law* 669 (3d ed. 1996) (noting that “courts have held
7 that personality conflicts at work that generate antipathy” and “‘snubbing’ by
8 supervisors and co-workers” are not actionable under § 704(a)). The anti-retaliation
9 provision seeks to prevent employer interference with “unfettered access” to Title
10 VII’s remedial mechanisms. It does so by prohibiting employer actions that are
11 likely “to deter victims of discrimination from complaining to the EEOC,” the
12 courts, and their employers. And normally petty slights, minor annoyances, and
13 simple lack of good manners will not create such deterrence. See 2 EEOC 1998
14 Manual § 8, p. 8-13.

15 We refer to reactions of a *reasonable* employee because we believe that the
16 provision’s standard for judging harm must be objective. An objective standard is
17 judicially administrable. It avoids the uncertainties and unfair discrepancies that
18 can plague a judicial effort to determine a plaintiff’s unusual subjective feelings.
19 We have emphasized the need for objective standards in other Title VII contexts,
20 and those same concerns animate our decision here. See, e.g., [*Pennsylvania State*
21 *Police v. Suders*, 542 U.S., at 141, 124 S. Ct. 2342, 159 L. Ed. 2d 204 (constructive
22 discharge doctrine); *Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc.*, 510 U.S. 17, 21, 114 S. Ct.
23 367, 126 L. Ed. 2d 295 (1993) (hostile work environment doctrine).

24 We phrase the standard in general terms because the significance of any
25 given act of retaliation will often depend upon the particular circumstances. Context
26 matters. . . . A schedule change in an employee’s work schedule may make little
27 difference to many workers, but may matter enormously to a young mother with
28 school age children. A supervisor’s refusal to invite an employee to lunch is
29 normally trivial, a nonactionable petty slight. But to retaliate by excluding an
30 employee from a weekly training lunch that contributes significantly to the
31 employee’s professional advancement might well deter a reasonable employee
32 from complaining about discrimination. Hence, a legal standard that speaks in
33 general terms rather than specific prohibited acts is preferable, for an act that would
34 be immaterial in some situations is material in others.

35 Finally, we note that . . . the standard is tied to the challenged retaliatory
36 act, not the underlying conduct that forms the basis of the Title VII complaint. By
37 focusing on the materiality of the challenged action and the perspective of a
38 reasonable person in the plaintiff’s position, we believe this standard will screen
39 out trivial conduct while effectively capturing those acts that are likely to dissuade
40 employees from complaining or assisting in complaints about discrimination.

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1 The anti-retaliation provision of Title VII, construed by the Court in *White*, is substantively
2 identical to the ADEA provision on retaliation, *supra*. This instruction therefore follows the
3 guidelines of the Supreme Court’s decision in *White*.

4 *No Requirement That Retaliation Be Job-Related To Be Actionable*

5 The Supreme Court in *Burlington N. & S.F. Ry. v. White*, 548 U.S. 53, 67 (2006), held
6 that retaliation need not be job-related to be actionable under Title VII. In doing so, the Court
7 rejected authority from the Court of Appeals (and others) requiring that the plaintiff suffer an
8 adverse employment action in order to recover for retaliation. The Court distinguished Title VII’s
9 retaliation provision from its basic anti-discrimination provision, which does require an adverse
10 employment action. The Court noted that unlike the basic anti-discrimination provision, which
11 refers to conditions of employment, the anti-retaliation provision is broadly worded to prohibit *any*
12 discrimination by an employer in response to protected activity.

13 Because the ADEA anti-retaliation provision is substantively identical to the Title VII
14 provision construed in *White* — it broadly prohibits discrimination without reference to
15 employment-related decisions — this instruction contains bracketed material to cover a plaintiff’s
16 claim for retaliation that is not job-related.

17 It should be noted, however, that damages for emotional distress and pain and suffering are
18 not recoverable under the ADEA. *Rogers v. Exxon Research and Engineering Co.*, 550 F.2d 834,
19 842 (3d Cir. 1977) (relying on legislative history tying recovery under the ADEA to that provided
20 by the Fair Labor Standards Act, and not Title VII; holding that “damages for pain and suffering
21 or emotional distress cannot properly be awarded in ADEA cases”), *overruled on other grounds*
22 *by Holliday v. Ketchum, MacLeod & Grove, Inc.*, 584 F.2d 1221 (3d Cir. 1978) (en banc). So, to
23 the extent that retaliatory activity is not job-related, it is probably less likely to be compensable
24 under the ADEA than it is under Title VII. For further discussion of *White*, see the Comment to
25 Instruction 5.1.7.

26 *Retaliation for another’s protected activity*

27 The Supreme Court held in *Thompson v. North American Stainless, LP*, 562 U.S. 170
28 (2011), that Title VII not only bars retaliation against the employee who engaged in the protected
29 activity, it also bars retaliation against another employee if the circumstances are such that the
30 retaliation against that employee might well dissuade a reasonable worker from engaging in
31 protected activity. *See id.* at 174. The *Thompson* Court did not discuss whether its holding
32 extends to retaliation claims under other statutory schemes such as the ADEA. The
33 *Thompson* Court’s holding that the third-party retaliation victim can sometimes assert a retaliation
34 claim under Title VII rested on the Court’s analysis of the specific statutory language of Title VII.
35 *See Thompson*, 562 U.S. at 175 (analyzing language in 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(f)(1) stating that “a
36 civil action may be brought ... by the person claiming to be aggrieved”). The ADEA contains
37 similar language. *See* 29 U.S.C. § 626(c)(1) (“Any person aggrieved may bring a civil action in
38 any court of competent jurisdiction for such legal or equitable relief as will effectuate the purposes
39 of this chapter”). For further discussion of *Thompson*, see Comment 5.1.7. For a pre-

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1 *Thompson* Court of Appeals case holding that the ADEA does not encompass third-party
2 retaliation claims, see *Fogleman v. Mercy Hosp., Inc.*, 283 F.3d 561, 570 (3d Cir. 2002).

3 *Determinative Effect*

4 As discussed in Comment 8.1.1, the Supreme Court has held with respect to non-retaliation
5 ADEA claims that the plaintiff must prove but-for causation (and thus that a mixed-motive burden-
6 shifting framework is unavailable). See *Gross v. FBL Financial Services, Inc.*, 557 U.S. 167, 177-
7 78 (2009). Although the *Gross* Court was interpreting 29 U.S.C. § 636(a), its reasoning seems
8 equally applicable to 29 U.S.C. § 636(d) (the ADEA’s anti-retaliation provision). And this view
9 also seems consistent with the Court’s more recent decision in *University of Texas Southwestern*
10 *Medical Center v. Nassar*, 570 U.S. 338, 352 (2013) (holding “that Title VII retaliation claims
11 require proof that the desire to retaliate was the but-for cause of the challenged employment
12 action”); *id.* at 357-359 (discussing policy concerns relating to the standard of proof for retaliation
13 claims).²⁰ Accordingly, Instruction 8.1.5 requires the plaintiff to prove that the plaintiff’s
14 protected activity had a determinative effect on the defendant’s retaliatory activity.

15 *Causation for Federal Employees*

16 *Babb v. Wilkie*, 140 S. Ct. 1168 (2020), recognized a modified causation structure
17 for ADEA discrimination claims under 29 U.S.C. § 633(a). See comment to Instruction
18 8.0. That provision has also been held to bar retaliation, despite the absence of explicit
19 language to that effect. *Gomez-Perez v. Potter*, 553 U.S. 474(2008). It is possible,
20 therefore, that the *Babb*’s structure will apply to ADEA retaliation claims by federal
21 employees.

23 *Non-retaliatory Reason; Pretext*

24 As with other types of discrimination or retaliation claims, the defendant may proffer a
25 non-retaliatory reason for its employment decision, and the plaintiff may seek to rebut that reason
26 by showing that it was really a cover-up for retaliation. See, e.g., *Daniels v. School District of*
27 *Philadelphia*, 776 F.3d 181, 198 (3d Cir. 2015) (upholding grant of summary judgment against
28 plaintiff on retaliation claims under, inter alia, the ADEA, because the defendant had “proffered
29 legitimate reasons for [its] adverse actions, which Daniels has failed to rebut”).

30 *Employer’s Attitude Toward Employee*

31 On the relevance of an employer’s attitude toward an employee who engaged in protected
32 activity, see *Fasold v. Justice*, 409 F.3d 178, 190 (3d Cir. 2005) (reversing a grant of summary

²⁰ See also *DiFiore v. CSL Behring, LLC*, 879 F.3d 71, 78 (3d Cir. 2018) (holding that a mixed-motive framework is unavailable for False Claims Act retaliation claims because “the language of the FCA anti-retaliation provision uses the same ‘because of’ language that compelled the Supreme Court to require ‘but-for’ causation in *Nassar* and *Gross*”).

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1 judgment for an employer on an ADEA retaliation claim and noting that “we cannot discount the
2 possibility that [the supervisor’s] irritation with Fasold’s pending administrative claims influenced
3 the calculus [the supervisor] made in his decision to deny the Level II grievance.”).

4 *Retaliation Against Perceived Protected Activity*

5 In *Fogleman v. Mercy Hospital, Inc.*, 283 F.3d 561, 562 (3d Cir. 2002), the court held that
6 anti-retaliation provisions in the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age Discrimination in
7 Employment Act, and Pennsylvania state law extended to retaliation for “perceived” protected
8 activity. “Because the statutes forbid an employer’s taking adverse action against an employee for
9 discriminatory reasons, it does not matter whether the factual basis for the employer’s
10 discriminatory animus was correct[;] ... so long as the employer’s specific intent was
11 discriminatory, the retaliation is actionable.” *Id.* at 562. If the fairly unusual case arises in which
12 the employer is alleged to have retaliated for perceived rather than actual protected activity, then
13 the instruction can be modified consistently with the court’s directive in *Fogleman*.

8.2.1 Hostile or Abusive Work Environment

8.2.1 ADEA Definitions — Hostile or Abusive Work Environment

Model

In determining whether a work environment is “hostile” you must look at all of the circumstances, which may include:

- The total physical environment of [plaintiff’s] work area.
- The degree and type of language and insult that filled the environment before and after [plaintiff] arrived.
- The reasonable expectations of [plaintiff] upon entering the environment.
- The frequency of the offensive conduct.
- The severity of the conduct.
- The effect of the working environment on [plaintiff’s] mental and emotional well-being.
- Whether the conduct was unwelcome, that is, conduct [plaintiff] regarded as unwanted or unpleasant.
- Whether the conduct was pervasive.
- Whether the conduct was directed toward [plaintiff].
- Whether the conduct was physically threatening or humiliating.
- Whether the conduct was merely a tasteless remark.
- Whether the conduct unreasonably interfered with [plaintiff’s] work performance.

Conduct that amounts only to ordinary socializing in the workplace, such as occasional horseplay, occasional use of abusive language, tasteless jokes, and occasional teasing, does not constitute an abusive or hostile work environment. A hostile work environment can be found only if there is extreme conduct amounting to a material change in the terms and conditions of employment. Moreover, isolated incidents, unless extremely serious, will not amount to a hostile work environment.

It is not enough that the work environment was generally harsh, unfriendly, unpleasant, crude or vulgar to all employees. In order to find a hostile work environment, you must find that [plaintiff] was harassed because of [his/her] age. The harassing conduct may, but need not be age-based in nature. Rather, its defining characteristic is that the harassment complained of was linked to [plaintiff’s] age. The key question is whether [plaintiff], as a person of [plaintiff’s age] was subjected to harsh employment conditions to which substantially younger employees were not.

It is important to understand that, in determining whether a hostile work environment existed at the [employer’s workplace] you must consider the evidence from the perspective of a

8.2.1 Hostile or Abusive Work Environment

1 reasonable person of [plaintiff's age] in the same position. That is, you must determine whether a
2 reasonable person of [plaintiff's age] would have been offended or harmed by the conduct in
3 question. You must evaluate the total circumstances and determine whether the alleged harassing
4 behavior could be objectively classified as the kind of behavior that would seriously affect the
5 psychological or emotional well-being of a reasonable person of [plaintiff's age]. The reasonable
6 person of [plaintiff's age] is simply one of normal sensitivity and emotional make-up.

8 **Comment**

9 This instruction can be used if the court wishes to provide a more detailed instruction on
10 what constitutes a hostile work environment than those set forth in Instructions 8.1.3 and 8.1.4.
11 This instruction is substantively identical to the definition of hostile work environment in Title VII
12 cases. *See* Instruction 5.2.1.

8.2.2 Constructive Discharge

8.2.2 ADEA Definitions — Constructive Discharge

Model

In this case, to show that [he/she] was subjected to an adverse “tangible employment action,” [plaintiff] claims that [he/she] was forced to resign due to conduct that discriminated against [him/her] on the basis of [plaintiff’s] age. Such a forced resignation, if proven, is called a “constructive discharge.” To prove that [he/she] was subjected to a constructive discharge, [plaintiff] must prove that working conditions became so intolerable that a reasonable person in the employee’s position would have felt compelled to resign.

Comment

In ADEA cases (as in Title VII cases, see Comment 5.2.2), courts in the Third Circuit “employ an objective test to determine whether an employee can recover on a claim of constructive discharge.... Specifically, a court must determine ‘whether a reasonable jury could find that the [employer] permitted conditions so unpleasant or difficult that a reasonable person would have felt compelled to resign.’” *Duffy v. Paper Magic Group, Inc.*, 265 F.3d 163, 167 (3d Cir. 2001). Instruction 8.2.2 is substantively identical to the constructive discharge instruction for Title VII actions. See Instruction 5.2.2.

This instruction can be used when the plaintiff was not fired but resigned, and claims that she nonetheless suffered an adverse employment action because she was constructively discharged due to an adverse action or actions that were sanctioned by her employer. This instruction is designed for use with either Instruction 8.1.1 or Instruction 8.1.2. Assuming that the Title VII framework concerning employer liability for harassment applies to ADEA actions, the employer’s ability to assert an *Ellerth/Faragher* affirmative defense in a constructive discharge case will depend on whether the constructive discharge resulted from actions that were sanctioned by the employer. See *Pennsylvania State Police v. Suders*, 542 U.S. 129, 140-41 (2004) (“[A]n employer does not have recourse to the *Ellerth/Faragher* affirmative defense when a supervisor’s official act precipitates the constructive discharge; absent such a ‘tangible employment action,’ however, the defense is available to the employer whose supervisors are charged with harassment.”); see also Comment 5.1.5.

8.3.1 Bona Fide Occupational Qualification

8.3.1 ADEA Defenses — Bona Fide Occupational Qualification

Model

If you find that [plaintiff] has established by a preponderance of the evidence that [defendant] [describe employment action] because of [his/her] age, then you must consider [defendant's] defense that its age limitation is a bona fide occupational qualification.

In order to avoid liability for intentional discrimination on the basis of this contention, [defendant] must prove both of the following elements by a preponderance of the evidence:

First: That the occupational qualification relied upon by [defendant] is reasonably necessary for the normal operation of [defendant's] business.

Second: That [defendant] either had reasonable cause to believe that all or substantially all persons over the age qualification would be unable to perform the job safely and efficiently, or that it was impossible or highly impractical to consider the necessary qualifications of each older employee. [Defendant's] belief should be evaluated in light of all the circumstances in the case, to determine whether it has a reasonable basis in fact.

If you find that [defendant] has proved these two elements by a preponderance of the evidence, then you must find for [defendant].

Comment

Section 4(f)(1) of the ADEA provides that it is not unlawful for an employer to take an action otherwise prohibited by the Act if “age is a bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary to the normal operation of the particular business.” 29 U.S.C. § 629(f)(1). This language is identical to that provided in Title VII. Accordingly, the instruction is substantively identical to Instruction 5.3.1, which covers the BFOQ defense in Title VII cases.

In *Western Airlines v. Criswell*, 472 U.S. 400, 410 (1985), the Court declared that the BFOQ defense is an “extremely narrow” exception; it held that the defense did not justify the employer’s plan to retire members of commercial airline flight crews when they reached 60 years of age. The *Criswell* Court described the BFOQ defense applicable in ADEA actions in the following passage:

An employer asserting a BFOQ defense has the burden of proving that (1) the age limit is reasonably necessary to the essence of the business, and either (2) that all or substantially all individuals excluded from the job involved are in fact disqualified, or (3) that some of the individuals so excluded possess a disqualifying trait that cannot be ascertained except by reference to age. If the employer’s objective in asserting a BFOQ is the goal of public safety, the employer must prove that the challenged practice does indeed effectuate that goal and that there is no acceptable alternative which would better advance it or equally advance it with less discriminatory impact.

8.3.1 Bona Fide Occupational Qualification

- 1 The *Criswell* Court made it clear that the BFOQ defense is an affirmative defense; the burden of
- 2 establishing its elements is on the defendant.

8.3.2 ADEA Defenses — Bona Fide Seniority System

Model

If you find that [plaintiff] has established by a preponderance of the evidence that [defendant] [describe employment action] because of [plaintiff's] age, then you must consider [defendant's] defense that it was applying the terms of a good faith seniority system. An employer can lawfully use a seniority system in making employment decisions unless the seniority rules were designed and used to discriminate against older workers. Put another way, if the seniority rules are legitimate and not designed to discriminate, then the rules are lawful and can be used to make employment decisions.

To establish the defense of a good faith seniority system, [defendant] must prove both of the following by a preponderance of the evidence:

First: That the seniority system used the length of service of employees, and not the age of the employees, as the primary basis for giving available job opportunities to its workers.

Second: That [defendant's] [challenged employment action] was consistent with its seniority system.

If you find that [defendant] has proved these two elements by a preponderance of the evidence, then you must find for [defendant].

Comment

The ADEA permits disparate treatment “to observe the terms of a bona fide seniority system that is not intended to evade the purposes of this Act, except that no such seniority system shall require or permit the involuntary retirement of any individual . . . because of the age of such individual.” 29 U.S.C. § 623(f)(2)(A). Thus the seniority system will be invalid if it is dependent on age rather than seniority. *See also Hazen Paper Co. v. Biggins*, 507 U.S. 604, 616 (1993) (rejecting a claim of age discrimination to the extent the challenged employment practice was based on the plaintiff's seniority not his age).

The Supreme Court has held that challenges to the effects of bona fide seniority systems may not be based upon assertions of disparate impact; rather, a plaintiff must prove intentional discrimination. *See International Brotherhood of Teamsters v. United States*, 431 U.S. 324, 352-56 (1977). *See also Hiatt v. Union Pacific R.R.*, 65 F.3d 838, 842 (10th Cir. 1995) (challenges of age discrimination to bona fide seniority systems must rest upon claim of disparate treatment rather than disparate impact).

8.3.3 ADEA Defenses — Waiver

Model

If you find that [plaintiff] has established by a preponderance of the evidence that [defendant] [describe employment action] because of [plaintiff's] age, then you must consider the defense alleged by [defendant] that [plaintiff] knowingly and voluntarily consented to a waiver of [plaintiff's] ADEA claims.

Federal law permits [plaintiff] to waive ADEA rights provided that, at a minimum, [defendant] proves by a preponderance of the evidence that the following safeguards are met:

1. The waiver is part of an agreement between [plaintiff] and [defendant] that is written in a way that is intended to be understood by [plaintiff] or by the average individual eligible to participate;
2. The waiver specifically refers to rights or claims arising out of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act;
3. [Plaintiff] did not waive rights or claims that may arise after the date the waiver was executed;
4. [Plaintiff] waived rights under the ADEA in exchange for something of value beyond that to which [he/she] was already entitled; and
5. [Plaintiff] was advised in writing to consult an attorney before executing the waiver agreement.

[In this case, [plaintiff] has presented evidence challenging the validity of this waiver. Specifically [describe plaintiff's evidence challenging waiver]. It is for you to determine whether or not the waiver was knowing and voluntary. In doing so, you must consider all the circumstances surrounding the signing of the waiver. [Defendant] has the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that [plaintiff's] waiver of ADEA rights was knowing and voluntary. The fact that the agreement complies with the minimum standards of Federal law does not necessarily mean that the waiver was knowing and voluntary.]

Comment

The Older Workers Benefit Protection Act (OWBPA) permits workers to sign releases of ADEA claims, provided the waiver is knowing and voluntary and the minimum standards of the OWBPA are met. 29 U.S.C. § 626(f)(1).²¹ The proponent of the release has the burden to prove

²¹ “It is hornbook law that employers can require terminated employees to release claims in exchange for benefits to which they would not otherwise be entitled.” *E.E.O.C. v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 778 F.3d 444, 449 (3d Cir. 2015). In *Allstate*, the employer conditioned its conversion of

8.3.3 Waiver

that the minimum statutory requirements for the release have been satisfied. *See Ruehl v. Viacom, Inc.*, 500 F.3d 375, 381 (3d Cir. 2007) (waiver invalid where employer could not establish that the employee was provided the necessary information required by the OWBPA: “Having the employee *say* he was informed in writing — when he was not — does not satisfy the OWBPA requirements.”) (emphasis in original). The minimum statutory requirements for a valid waiver are as follows:

(A) the waiver is part of an agreement between the individual and the employer that is written in a manner calculated to be understood by such individual, or by the average individual eligible to participate;

(B) the waiver specifically refers to rights or claims arising under [the ADEA];

(C) the individual does not waive rights or claims that may arise after the date the waiver is executed;

(D) the individual waives rights or claims only in exchange for consideration in addition to anything of value to which the individual already is entitled;

(E) the individual is advised in writing to consult an attorney prior to executing the agreement.

29 U.S.C. § 626(f)(1). *See Lewis and Norman, Employment Discrimination* 456-57 (2d ed. 2004) for a discussion of the statutory requirements.

The statutory factors are minimum requirements. *See Wastak v. Lehigh Valley Health Network*, 342 F.3d 281, 295, n.8 (3d Cir. 2003) (noting that the OWBPA establishes “a floor, not a ceiling”). Whether a waiver is knowing and voluntary is determined by a totality of the circumstances. *See Bennett v. Coors Brewing Co.*, 189 F.3d 1221, 1229 (10th Cir. 1999) (noting that the statutory factors governing a waiver under OWBPA are minimum requirements, and holding that non-statutory factors such as fraud and duress may render an ADEA waiver not knowing and voluntary); *Griffin v. Kraft General Foods, Inc.*, 62 F.3d 368, 373-74 (11th Cir. 1995) (validity of waiver of ADEA claims must be determined under the totality of the circumstances). But if the waiver agreement on its face meets the minimum statutory requirements of OWBPA, the issue of whether or not the plaintiff has given a knowing and voluntary consent to a waiver of ADEA claims will only reach the jury if the plaintiff has come forward with specific evidence sufficient to raise a question as to the validity of the waiver. The court in *Pierce v. Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe Ry.*, 110 F.3d 431, 438 (7th Cir. 1997), explained why the plaintiff has a burden of

terminated at-will employees into independent contractors on the employees’ signing releases of all existing claims (including but not limited to discrimination claims). The Court of Appeals rejected the EEOC’s argument that there was inadequate consideration for such releases, reasoning that there was no “good reason why an employer cannot require a release of discrimination claims by a terminated employee in exchange for a new business relationship with the employer.” *Allstate*, 778 F.3d at 451.

8.3.3 Waiver

1 production when contending that a release conforming with the statute was not knowing and
2 voluntary:

3 To place upon the employer the burden of demonstrating that an otherwise
4 unambiguous release of claims was not signed knowingly and voluntarily risks
5 undermining the usefulness of waivers by clouding them in uncertainty. This
6 danger is compounded by the difficulty of demonstrating that someone's actions
7 were knowing and voluntary, an assumption about human behavior which the law
8 typically indulges as a matter of faith.
9

10 This line of reasoning has force. . . . [W]e believe that the concerns it reflects are
11 adequately addressed by placing the burden of production, rather than the burden
12 of proof, on the party who . . . seeks to invalidate a waiver of federal rights. Such
13 a rule does not mean that a claim that a release was not executed knowingly and
14 voluntarily will necessarily reach a jury. The plaintiff must come forward with
15 specific evidence sufficient to raise a question as to the validity of the release
16 A bald assertion of misrepresentation by the employer, standing alone, is legally
17 insufficient. Moreover, certain factors, such as the participation of an attorney in
18 negotiating the release, will give rise to a presumption that the waiver was knowing
19 and voluntary. As for the difficulty of establishing that an employee did not act
20 knowingly and voluntarily, a burden which some have likened to "proving a
21 negative," we believe that this difficulty is minimized by requiring the employee to
22 produce specific evidence of factors that vitiated his consent to the release.
23

24 The court in *Pierce* emphasized—as does the instruction—that while the plaintiff has a
25 burden of production when the release conforms to minimum statutory requirements, it is the
26 defendant's burden to prove that the release was knowing and voluntary once the plaintiff's burden
27 of production is met.

28 An employer who obtains a waiver through a nonconforming release cannot defeat an
29 ADEA claim simply because the plaintiff did not tender back the consideration paid in exchange
30 for the waiver. *Oubre v. Entergy Operations, Inc.*, 522 U.S. 422, 427-28 (1998).

8.4.1 General Compensatory Damages

8.4.1 ADEA Damages — General Compensatory Damages

No Instruction

Comment

General compensatory damages, such as for pain and suffering, are not recoverable in ADEA actions. *Rogers v. Exxon Research and Engineering Co.*, 550 F.2d 834, 842 (3d Cir. 1977) (relying on legislative history tying recovery under the ADEA to that provided by the Fair Labor Standards Act, and not Title VII; holding that “damages for pain and suffering or emotional distress cannot properly be awarded in ADEA cases”), *overruled on other grounds by Holliday v. Ketchum, MacLeod & Grove, Inc.*, 584 F.2d 1221 (3d Cir. 1978) (en banc); *Haskell v. Kaman Corp.*, 743 F.2d 113, 120-21 (2d Cir. 1984) (“plaintiffs are not entitled to recovery for emotional distress in ADEA actions”).

The ADEA mandates an award for back pay and liquidated damages, and permits an award for front pay. See Instructions 8.4.2 - 8.4.4 for instructions covering these awards.

8.4.2. ADEA Damages — Back Pay

Model

If you find that [defendant] intentionally discriminated against [plaintiff] in [describe employment action] [plaintiff], then you must determine the amount of damages that [defendant's] actions have caused [plaintiff]. [Plaintiff] has the burden of proving damages by a preponderance of the evidence.

You must award as actual damages an amount that reasonably compensates [plaintiff] for any lost wages and benefits, taking into consideration any increases in salary and benefits, including pension, that [plaintiff] would have received from [defendant] had [plaintiff] not been the subject of [defendant's] intentional discrimination.

Back pay damages, if any, apply from the time [plaintiff] was [describe adverse employment action] until the date of your verdict.

You must reduce any award by the amount of the expenses that [plaintiff] would have incurred in making those earnings.

If you award back pay, you are instructed to deduct from the back pay figure whatever wages [plaintiff] has obtained from other employment during this period. However, please note that you should not deduct social security benefits, unemployment compensation and pension benefits from an award of back pay.

[You are further instructed that [plaintiff] has a duty to mitigate [his/her] damages--that is [plaintiff] is required to make reasonable efforts under the circumstances to reduce [his/her] damages. It is [defendant's] burden to prove that [plaintiff] has failed to mitigate. So if [defendant] persuades you, by a preponderance of the evidence, that [plaintiff] failed to obtain substantially equivalent job opportunities that were reasonably available to [him/ her], you must reduce the award of damages by the amount of the wages that [plaintiff] reasonably would have earned if [he/she] had obtained those opportunities.]

[In assessing damages, you must not consider attorney fees or the costs of litigating this case. Attorney fees and costs, if relevant at all, are for the court and not the jury to determine. Therefore, attorney fees and costs should play no part in your calculation of any damages.]

[Add the following instruction if the employer claims “after-acquired evidence” of misconduct by the plaintiff:

[Defendant] contends that it would have made the same decision to [describe employment decision] [plaintiff] because of conduct that [defendant] discovered after it made the employment decision. Specifically, [defendant] claims that when it became aware of the [describe the after-discovered misconduct], [defendant] would have made the decision at that point had it not been made previously.

If [defendant] proves by a preponderance of the evidence that it would have made the same decision and would have [describe employment decision] [plaintiff] because of [describe after-

8.4.2 Back Pay

discovered evidence], you must limit any award of back pay to the date [defendant] would have made the decision to [describe employment decision] [plaintiff] as a result of the after-acquired information.]

Comment

Back pay awards are mandatory under the ADEA after a finding of discrimination; the ADEA incorporates damages provisions from the Fair Labor Standards Act providing that back pay “shall” be awarded. Accordingly, while back pay is an equitable remedy under some statutes (such as Title VII), back pay is a damages remedy under the ADEA, and therefore the parties have a right to a jury trial on questions of back pay. *See Lorillard v. Pons*, 434 U.S. 575, 584 (1978) (noting that the ADEA incorporates the FLSA provision that employers “shall be liable” for amounts deemed unpaid minimum wages or overtime compensation, while under Title VII, the availability of backpay is a matter of equitable discretion, and holding that in a private action under the ADEA a trial by jury is available where sought by one of the parties); *Anastasio v. Schering Corp.*, 838 F.2d 701 (3d Cir. 1988) (distinguishing the ADEA, where back pay is a mandatory element of damages, from the discretionary back pay remedy in Title VII).

In *McKennon v. Nashville Banner Publishing Co.*, 513 U.S. 352, 362 (1995), the Court held that if an employer discharges an employee for a discriminatory reason, later-discovered evidence that the employer could have used to discharge the employee for a legitimate reason does not immunize the employer from liability. However, the employer in such a circumstance does not have to offer reinstatement or front pay and only has to provide back pay “from the date of the unlawful discharge to the date the new information was discovered.” 513 U.S. at 362. *See also Mardell v. Harleysville Life Ins. Co.*, 65 F.3d 1072, 1073 (3d Cir. 1995) (stating that “after-acquired evidence may be used to limit the remedies available to a plaintiff where the employer can first establish that the wrongdoing was of such severity that the employee in fact would have been terminated on those grounds alone if the employer had known of it at the time of the discharge.”). Both *McKennon* and *Mardell* observe that the defendant has the burden of showing that it would have made the same employment decision when it became aware of the post-decision evidence of the employee’s misconduct.

Under the ADEA, collateral benefits such as unemployment compensation, pension benefits and social security benefits are not to be deducted from a back pay award. *Berndt v. Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Sales, Inc.*, 789 F.2d 253 (3d Cir. 1986) (unemployment compensation is not to be deducted from a back pay award in an ADEA action); *Maxfield v. Sinclair Int’l*, 766 F.2d 788 (3d Cir. 1985) (social security benefits cannot be offset as an award of backpay is a mandatory element of damages under the ADEA). In contrast, courts have held that the ADEA does require interim earnings to be deducted from back pay awards. *Id.* The instruction reflects these legal standards.

Attorney Fees and Costs

There appears to be no uniform practice regarding the use of an instruction that warns the jury against speculation on attorney fees and costs. In *Collins v. Alco Parking Corp.*, 448 F.3d 652

8.4.2 Back Pay

(3d Cir. 2006), the district court gave the following instruction: “You are instructed that if plaintiff wins on his claim, he may be entitled to an award of attorney fees and costs over and above what you award as damages. It is my duty to decide whether to award attorney fees and costs, and if so, how much. Therefore, attorney fees and costs should play no part in your calculation of any damages.” *Id.* at 656-57. The Court of Appeals held that the plaintiff had not properly objected to the instruction, and, reviewing for plain error, found none: “We need not and do not decide now whether a district court commits error by informing a jury about the availability of attorney fees in an ADEA case. Assuming *arguendo* that an error occurred, such error is not plain, for two reasons.” *Id.* at 657. First, “it is not ‘obvious’ or ‘plain’ that an instruction directing the jury *not* to consider attorney fees” is irrelevant or prejudicial; “it is at least arguable that a jury tasked with computing damages might, absent information that the Court has discretion to award attorney fees at a later stage, seek to compensate a sympathetic plaintiff for the expense of litigation.” *Id.* Second, it is implausible “that the jury, in order to eliminate the chance that Collins might be awarded attorney fees, took the disproportionate step of returning a verdict against him even though it believed he was the victim of age discrimination, notwithstanding the District Court’s clear instructions to the contrary.” *Id.*; *see also id.* at 658 (distinguishing *Fisher v. City of Memphis*, 234 F.3d 312, 319 (6th Cir. 2000), and *Brooks v. Cook*, 938 F.2d 1048, 1051 (9th Cir. 1991)).

8.4.3. ADEA Damages — Liquidated Damages

Model

If you find that [plaintiff] is entitled to recover damages for lost wages or benefits, then I will also ask you to decide a further question: whether [defendant’s] conduct was willful. For purposes of your answer to that question, [plaintiff] has the burden of proving willfulness by a preponderance of the evidence.

You must find [defendant’s] violation of the ADEA to be willful if [defendant] knew or showed reckless disregard for whether the [challenged action] was prohibited by the law. To establish willfulness it is not enough to show that [defendant] acted negligently. If you find that [defendant] did not know, or knew only that the law was potentially applicable, and did not act in reckless disregard as to whether its conduct was prohibited by the law, then [defendant’s] conduct was not willful.

Comment

Punitive damages are not available under the ADEA. *Rogers v. Exxon Research and Engineering Co.*, 550 F.2d 834, 842 (3d Cir. 1977), *overruled on other grounds by Holliday v. Ketchum, MacLeod & Grove, Inc.*, 584 F.2d 1221 (3d Cir. 1978) (en banc). 29 U.S.C. § 626(b) instead incorporates the liquidated damages provision of the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. § 216(b). The statute provides that doubling of damages is mandatory if there is a finding that the defendant willfully violated the law.²² Instruction 8.4.3 does not tell the jury the reason it is being asked to determine willfulness; if the jury finds willfulness, then the court doubles the damages based on the jury’s finding. The concern is that, if the jury knows the effect of the willfulness determination, it might adjust its damages assessment in light of that information. Instructions for use in four other circuits similarly do not tell the jury the reason it is being asked to determine willfulness. *See* Seventh Circuit Instruction 3.06 (2017); Eighth Circuit Instruction 6.20 (2023); Ninth Circuit Instruction 11.14 (2024); Eleventh Circuit Instruction 4.10 (2024). *But see* Fifth Circuit Instruction 11.18 (2020) (instructing jury that “[a] plaintiff who proves that [his/her] [former] employer acted willfully in violating the ADEA is entitled to additional damages” – but without specifying the measure of those additional damages).

In *Trans World Airlines v. Thurston*, 469 U.S. 111, 128 (1985), the Court held that willfulness must be found under the ADEA if the employer either knew or showed reckless disregard of the fact that its conduct was prohibited by the statute. The challenged action in *Thurston* was the company-wide implementation of a policy that was found to violate the ADEA. *Thurston*, 469 U.S. at 114-15. The Court held that a willful violation could not be found under the

²² *Cf. Marrow v. Allstate Sec. & Investigative Services, Inc.*, 167 F. Supp. 2d 838, 841 (E.D. Pa. 2001) (holding that punitive damages are available for claims of retaliation under the Equal Pay Act and Fair Labor Standards Act, and distinguishing ADEA actions, where punitive damages are not available for any claim).

8.4.3 Liquidated Damages

1 circumstances, as the company had sought advice of counsel in advance of the implementation of
2 the policy, and was told that the policy would not violate the ADEA. *Id.* at 130.

3 The same “knowing/reckless disregard” test of willfulness applies to acts of intentional
4 discrimination against individuals.

5 *Hazen Paper Co., v. Biggins*, 507 U.S. 604 (1993) (rejecting, in a case involving a
6 discrete action against a single employee, any requirement that defendant’s action must be
7 “outrageous” before liquidated damages could be imposed). Still, liquidated damages are not
8 necessarily automatic in all cases in which a discrete act was found to be intentional age
9 discrimination. As the Court declared in *Hazen Paper*:

10 It is not true that an employer who knowingly relies on age in reaching its
11 decision invariably commits a knowing or reckless violation of the ADEA. The
12 ADEA is not an unqualified prohibition on the use of age in employment
13 decisions, but affords the employer a “bona fide occupational qualification”
14 defense, and exempts certain subject matters and persons, see, e. g., § 623(f)(2)
15 (exemption for bona fide seniority systems and employee benefit plans); § 631(c)
16 (exemption for bona fide executives and high policymakers). If an employer
17 incorrectly but in good faith and nonrecklessly believes that the statute permits a
18 particular age-based decision, then liquidated damages should not be imposed.

19 Nor do we see how the instant case can be distinguished from *Thurston* . .
20 . The only distinction between *Thurston* and the case before us is the existence of
21 formal discrimination. Age entered into the employment decision there through a
22 formal and publicized policy, and not as an undisclosed factor motivating the
23 employer on an ad hoc basis, which is what respondent alleges occurred here. But
24 surely an employer’s reluctance to acknowledge its reliance on the forbidden
25 factor should not cut against imposing a penalty. It would be a wholly circular and
26 self-defeating interpretation of the ADEA to hold that, in cases where an
27 employer more likely knows its conduct to be illegal, knowledge alone does not
28 suffice for liquidated damages.

29 We therefore reaffirm that the *Thurston* definition of “willful” -- that the
30 employer either knew or showed reckless disregard for the matter of whether its
31 conduct was prohibited by the statute -- applies to all disparate treatment cases
32 under the ADEA. Once a “willful” violation has been shown, the employee need
33 not additionally demonstrate that the employer’s conduct was outrageous, or
34 provide direct evidence of the employer’s motivation, or prove that age was the
35 predominant, rather than a determinative, factor in the employment decision.

36 507 U.S. at 616. Accordingly, the instruction does not include any requirement that the
37 defendant’s conduct must have been outrageous. See *Starceski v. Westinghouse Elec. Corp.*, 54
38 F.3d 1089, 1099, n.2 (3d Cir. 1995) (noting that the Court of Appeals’s “outrageousness”
39 requirement from *Dreyer v. ARCO Chem. Co.*, 801 F.2d 651, 656-57 (3d Cir. 1986) had been
40 effectively overruled by *Hazen*).

8.4.3 Liquidated Damages

1 The amount of damages to be doubled under the ADEA liquidated damages provision
2 does not include front pay. *Blum v. Witco Chem. Corp.*, 829 F.2d 367, 373 (3d Cir. 1987) (noting
3 that a front pay award “is the monetary equivalent of the equitable remedy of reinstatement” and
4 therefore is not part of the “wages” that are to be doubled under the terms of the statute).

5 Liquidated damages are of course not available in disparate impact cases, as liquidated
6 damages are premised on a knowing or reckless disregard of the law. In contrast, disparate
7 impact liability is not dependent on a knowing or intentional violation.

8 In *Potence v. Hazleton Area School District*, 357 F.3d 366 (3d Cir. 2004), the court held
9 that the ADEA authorizes the imposition of liquidated damages against government employers
10 who engage in willful age discrimination.

8.4.4. ADEA Damages — Front Pay

Model

You may determine and award separately a monetary amount equal to the present value of any future wages and benefits that [plaintiff] would reasonably have earned from [defendant] had [plaintiff] not [describe adverse employment action] for the period from the date of your verdict through a reasonable period of time in the future. From this figure you must subtract the amount of earnings and benefits [plaintiff] will receive from other employment during that time. [Plaintiff] has the burden of proving these damages by a preponderance of the evidence.

[If you find that [plaintiff] is entitled to recovery of future earnings from [defendant], then you must reduce any award by the amount of the expenses that [plaintiff] would have incurred in making those earnings.]

You must also reduce any award to its present value by considering the interest that [plaintiff] could earn on the amount of the award if [he/she] made a relatively risk-free investment. The reason you must make this reduction is because an award of an amount representing future loss of earnings is more valuable to [plaintiff] if [he/she] receives it today than if it were received at the time in the future when it would have been earned. It is more valuable because [plaintiff] can earn interest on it for the period of time between the date of the award and the date [he/she] would have earned the money. So you should decrease the amount of any award for loss of future earnings by the amount of interest that [plaintiff] can earn on that amount in the future.

[Add the following instruction if defendant claims “after-acquired evidence” of misconduct by the plaintiff:]

[Defendant] contends that it would have made the same decision to [describe employment decision] [plaintiff] because of conduct that it discovered after it made the employment decision. Specifically, [defendant] claims that when it became aware of the [describe the after-discovered misconduct], it would have made the decision at that point had it not been made previously.

If [defendant] proves by a preponderance of the evidence that it would have made the same decision and would have [describe employment decision] [plaintiff] because of [describe after-discovered evidence], then you may not award [plaintiff] any amount for wages that would have been received from [defendant] in the future.]

Comment

Front pay may be awarded if reinstatement is not possible. In *Maxfield v. Sinclair Int'l*, 766 F.2d 788, 795-96 (3d Cir. 1985), the court rejected the defendant’s argument that an award

8.4.4 Front Pay

of front pay is not permitted in an ADEA action, and discussed the role of a front pay award in the following passage:

Although this court has not yet spoken on whether an award of future lost earnings is precluded by the ADEA, . . . the line of cases we find most persuasive allows such an award. As Judge Weinfeld wrote in *Koyen v. Consolidated Edison Co. of New York*, 560 F. Supp. 1161, 1168 (S.D.N.Y. 1983), “To deny [authority to grant front pay] would defeat a purpose of the Act to make a victim of discrimination ‘whole’ and to restore him to the economic position he would have occupied but for the unlawful conduct of his employer.”

Moreover, it is significant that whereas the FLSA has no provision for future damages, when Congress enacted the ADEA it added the following provision to the remedies taken from the FLSA:

In any action brought to enforce this chapter, the court shall have jurisdiction to grant such legal or equitable relief as may be appropriate to effectuate the purposes of this chapter, including without limitation judgments compelling employment, reinstatement or promotion, or enforcing the liability for amounts deemed to be unpaid minimum wages or overtime compensation under this section.

29 U.S.C. § 626(b). The inclusion of equitable relief strengthens the conclusion that Congress intended victims of age discrimination to be made whole by restoring them to the position they would have been in had the discrimination never occurred.

Front pay, an award for future earnings, is sometimes needed to achieve that purpose. Ordinarily, an employee would be made whole by a backpay award coupled with an order for reinstatement. Reinstatement is the preferred remedy to avoid future lost earnings, but reinstatement may not be feasible in all cases. There may be no position available at the time of judgment or the relationship between the parties may have been so damaged by animosity that reinstatement is impracticable. In such circumstances, the remedial purpose of the statute would be thwarted and plaintiff would suffer irreparable harm if front pay were not available as an alternate remedy to reinstatement. Since reinstatement is an equitable remedy, it is the district court that should decide whether reinstatement is feasible. *Of course the amount of damages available as front pay is a jury question.* (Emphasis added).

Because front pay is essentially an equitable remedy in lieu of reinstatement, the plaintiff’s entitlement to front pay is an issue for the court, not the jury. But in *Maxfield, supra*, the court declared that once the court finds that reinstatement is not feasible, it is for the jury to determine the amount of “damages” available as front pay. Thus, it appears in the Third Circuit that the parties have the right to a jury trial to determine the amount of front pay — though this is not the case in actions brought under Title VII or Section 1981.

8.4.5 ADEA Damages — Nominal Damages

Model

If you return a verdict for [plaintiff], but [plaintiff] has failed to prove actual injury and therefore is not entitled to damages, then you must award nominal damages of \$ 1.00.

A person whose federal rights were violated is entitled to a recognition of that violation, even if [he] suffered no compensable injury. Nominal damages (of \$1.00) are designed to acknowledge the deprivation of a federal right, even where no compensable injury occurred.

However, if you find compensable injury, you must award damages for lost wages or benefits (as I instructed you), rather than nominal damages.

Comment

There is no Court of Appeals case law on the availability of nominal damages in an ADEA case. But it appears that an award of nominal damages in an ADEA action might be justified in an extraordinary case, and so a pattern instruction is provided. The Eighth Circuit Committee Comment on a nominal damage instruction in an ADEA case opines that “[n]ominal damages normally are not appropriate in ADEA cases” and explains as follows:

Recoverable damages in ADEA cases normally are limited to lost wages and benefits and in most ADEA cases, it will be undisputed that the plaintiff has some actual damages. Although case law does not clearly authorize this remedy in age discrimination cases, a nominal damage instruction may be considered in appropriate cases, and Model Instruction 5.02B, *supra*, should be used. Most cases that allow nominal damages just assume they are permissible without much discussion of the issue. *See e.g., Drez v. E.R. Squibb & Sons, Inc.*, 674 F. Supp. 1432, 1438 (D. Kan. 1987) (ADEA); *Graefenhain v. Pabst Brewing Co.*, 670 F. Supp. 1415, 1416 (E.D. Wis. 1987) (ADEA).