

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

EFRAIN DUENAS

Claimant

GREEN WAY FARMS INC

Employer

APPEAL 20A-UI-02088-AD-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 02/02/20

Claimant: Respondent (2)

Iowa Code § 96.6(2) – Timeliness of Protest

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

On March 7, 2020, Green Way Farms, Inc. (employer/appellant) filed an appeal from the February 28, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that found employer's protest untimely.

A telephone hearing was held on April 22, 2020, at 1 p.m. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. Efrain Duenas (claimant) did not register a number for the hearing and did not participate. Employer participated by owner Bob Groeneweg.

Official notice was taken of the administrative record, including the notice of appeal and statement of protest.

ISSUE:

Whether employer filed a timely protest.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds:

The Notice of Claim was mailed to employer at the above address on February 11, 2020. That was employer's correct business address on that date. The notice of claim contains a warning that the employer protest response is due ten days from the initial notice date and gave a response deadline of February 21, 2020. The employer completed, signed, and postmarked the Statement of Protest on February 25, 2020.

The delay in submitting the Statement of Protest was two-fold. The usual employee who handled correspondence of this nature had recently left employer and had not yet been replaced. Groeneweg was unable to review the correspondence and respond personally, as he is visually impaired. It was not until his wife was able to help with the correspondence on February 25, 2020, that the Notice of Claim was discovered. Groeneweg immediately responded and mailed the Statement of Protest upon discovery of it.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes that employer's protest was timely.

Iowa Code § 96.6(2) provides:

2. Initial determination. A representative designated by the director shall promptly notify all interested parties to the claim of its filing, and the parties have ten days from the date of mailing the notice of the filing of the claim by ordinary mail to the last known address to protest payment of benefits to the claimant.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.35(1)(a) provides:

1. Except as otherwise provided by statute or by division rule, any payment, appeal, application, request, notice, objection, petition, report or other information or document submitted to the division shall be considered received by and filed with the division:

(a) If transmitted via the United States Postal Service on the date it is mailed as shown by the postmark, or in the absence of a postmark the postage meter mark on the envelope in which it is received; or if not postmarked or postage meter marked or if the mark is illegible, on the date entered on the document as the date of completion.

(b)

(c) If transmitted by any means other than [United States Postal Service or the State Identification Data Exchange System (SIDES)], on the date it is received by the division.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.35(2) provides:

2. The submission of any payment, appeal, application, request, notice, objection, petition, report or other information or document not within the specified statutory or regulatory period shall be considered timely if it is established to the satisfaction of the division that the delay in submission was due to division error or misinformation or to delay or other action of the United States postal service.

There is a mandatory duty to file appeals from representatives' decisions within the time allotted by statute, and the Administrative Law Judge has no authority to change the decision of representative if a timely appeal is not filed. *Franklin v. Iowa Dept. Job Service*, 277 N.W.2d 877, 881 (Iowa 1979). The ten-day period for appealing an initial determination concerning a claim for benefits has been described as jurisdictional. *Messina v. Iowa Dept. of Job Service*, 341 N.W.2d 52, 55 (Iowa 1983); *Beardslee v. Iowa Dept. Job Service*, 276 N.W.2d 373 (Iowa 1979). The only basis for changing the ten-day period would be where notice to the appealing party was constitutionally invalid. *E.g. Beardslee v. Iowa Dept. Job Service*, 276 N.W.2d 373, 377 (Iowa 1979). The question in such cases becomes whether the appellant was deprived of a reasonable opportunity to assert an appeal in a timely fashion. *Hendren v. Iowa Employment Sec. Commission*, 217 N.W.2d 255 (Iowa 1974); *Smith v. Iowa Employment Sec. Commission*, 212 N.W.2d 471 (Iowa 1973). The question of whether the Claimant has been denied a reasonable opportunity to assert an appeal is also informed by rule 871-24.35(2) which states that "the submission of any ...appeal...not within the specified statutory or regulatory period shall be considered timely if it is established to the satisfaction of the division that the delay in submission

was due to division error or misinformation or to delay or other action of the United States postal service.”

Employer's delay in submitting its protest was due to the recent loss of an employee. This alone would not typically prompt the administrative law judge to find the protest timely, as it is ultimately a business owner's responsibility to see to the timely completion of important company business themselves, regardless of the comings and goings of employees. However, this case is different in that Groeneweg was unable to handle this important company business himself due to his visual impairment. This changes the usual calculus in cases of this nature. Given the circumstances, it would be fundamentally unfair and an affront to the principles of due process to find employer's protest untimely.

DECISION:

The February 28, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that found employer's protest untimely is REVERSED. The protest was timely.

REMAND:

The separation issue is remanded to the Benefits Bureau of Iowa Workforce Development for a fact-finding interview and unemployment insurance decision.



Andrew B. Duffelmeyer
Administrative Law Judge
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April 24, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

abd/scn