

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

TIFFANY K MCNEAL
Claimant

APPEAL 18A-UI-08907-DB

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT**

OC: 08/05/18
Claimant: Appellant (6)

Iowa Code § 96.5 – Overpayment of Fraud Balance
Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) – Default Decision
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(6) – Dismissal of Appeal on Default

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant/appellant, Tiffany K. McNeal, filed an appeal from the August 15, 2018 (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision that concluded claimant was not eligible for benefits. A notice of hearing was mailed to the claimant's last known address of record for an in-person hearing scheduled for October 18, 2018 at 10:00 a.m. in Ottumwa, Iowa. The appellant failed to appear for the in person hearing. Because the appellant failed to follow the instructions on the notice of hearing, and was not available by appearing at the time and date scheduled for this in-person appeal hearing, no hearing was held.

ISSUE:

Should the appeal be dismissed based on the appellant's failure to appear and participate?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The appellant was properly notified of the scheduled hearing for this appeal. The appellant failed to appear at the time scheduled for this appeal hearing as required by the hearing notice. The appellant did not request a postponement of the hearing. No hearing was held.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advises:

In-Person Hearing:

THU
10:00 AM

OCT 18, 2018

Date
Iowa Time

When you arrive at the hearing location, do not wait in line. You should immediately ask workforce center staff where to go for the hearing. On the scheduled date, you must be present at the location identified above and ready to participate in the hearing at the scheduled time.

The back page of the hearing notice provides further instruction and warning:

Failure to Participate in Appeal Hearing

If you do not participate in the hearing, the judge may dismiss the appeal or issue a decision without considering your evidence. You can ask to participate in the in-person hearing via telephone. 871 IAC 26.6(4).

This information is provided in the Spanish language as well.

The record was left open for a grace period of 30 minutes after the hearing start time to give the appellant a reasonable opportunity to participate. Holding the appellant in default for failure to appear and participate during a 30-minute window after the hearing start time is reasonable considering the time allocated for each unemployment hearing. Allowing this additional time period is more than reasonable under the circumstances. The unemployment insurance decision had concluded that the claimant was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The Iowa Administrative Procedure Act at Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) provides in pertinent part:

If a party fails to appear or participate in a contested case proceeding after proper service of notice, the presiding officer may, if no adjournment is granted, enter a default decision or proceed with the hearing and make a decision in the absence of the party. ... If a decision is rendered against a party who failed to appear for the hearing and the presiding officer is timely requested by that party to vacate the decision for good cause, the time for initiating a further appeal is stayed pending a determination by the presiding officer to grant or deny the request. If adequate reasons are provided showing good cause for the party's failure to appear, the presiding officer shall vacate the decision and, after proper service of notice, conduct another evidentiary hearing. **If adequate reasons are not provided showing good cause for the party's failure to appear, the presiding officer shall deny the motion to vacate.**

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(6) provides:

If one or more parties which received notice for a contested case hearing fail to appear at the time and place of an in-person hearing, the presiding officer may proceed with the hearing. If the appealing party fails to appear, the presiding officer may decide the party is in default and dismiss the appeal. The hearing may be reopened if the absent party makes a request in writing to reopen the hearing under subrule 26.8(3) and shows good cause for reopening the hearing.

a. If an absent party arrives for an in-person hearing while the hearing is in session, the presiding officer shall pause to admit the party, summarize the hearing to that point, administer the oath, and resume the hearing.

b. If an absent party arrives for an in-person hearing after the record has been closed and after any party which had participated in the hearing has departed, the presiding officer shall not take the evidence of the late party.

The Iowa Supreme Court has opined that a default should not be set aside for ordinary negligence or want of ordinary care. Defaults should not be set aside where the movant ignores plain instruction with ample opportunity to comply. *Houlihan v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 545 N.W.2d 863 (Iowa 1996). Here, the clear directive is to read the hearing notice and be present at the location for the in-person hearing. Due process requires notice and an opportunity to be heard,

both of which were provided the appellant. The rule does not provide exceptions for good intentions and/or a party contacting the Appeals Bureau within a 'reasonable' or certain amount of time after the hearing is scheduled. It is assumed an appellant intends to participate in the hearing simply by the fact that an appeal is filed, but the appellant's responsibility does not end there. The appellant is required to follow the prominent specific written instructions printed on the hearing notice. The appellant filed the appeal and is held solely responsible for going forward with the case in a prompt and deliberate manner. The rule holds an appellant in default if not present at the start of hearing. As a courtesy, appellant was granted an additional 30-minute grace period not required by statute or rule.

Here, notwithstanding notice, opportunity and additional time, the appellant failed to prosecute the case at the appointed date and time without providing a good-cause reason for the delay or failure to do so. Accordingly, the appellant is in default and the appeal shall be dismissed. Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(6). The unemployment insurance decision remains in force and effect. If the appellant does not intend to pursue this appeal, the appellant need not take any action. If the appellant intends to pursue this appeal, the appellant must make a written request to the administrative law judge that the hearing be reopened within 15 days after the mailing date of this decision. The written request should be mailed to the administrative law judge at the address listed at the end of this decision and must explain the emergency or other good cause that prevented the appellant from participating in the hearing at its scheduled time. The appellant also has the option to appeal the decision directly to the Employment Appeal Board at the address listed in the caption appeal rights information.

DECISION:

The August 15, 2018 (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision concluding that the claimant was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed.

Dawn Boucher
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax (515)478-3528

Decision Dated and Mailed

db/rvs