

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

SARAH N NGALULA
Claimant

IOWA PREMIUM LLC
Employer

APPEAL 21A-UI-23174-SC-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 09/05/21
Claimant: Appellant (6)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting
Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) – Default Decision
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) – Dismissal of Appeal on Default

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

On October 18, 2021, Sarah N. Ngalula (claimant) filed an appeal from the October 11, 2021, reference 01, unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon the determination she voluntarily quit employment with Iowa Premium LLC (employer) due to a nonwork related illness or injury. Notices of hearing were mailed to the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for December 9, 2021, at 2:00 p.m. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant failed to call the toll-free number listed on the hearing notice at the time of the hearing and no hearing was held.

ISSUE:

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

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The parties were properly notified of the scheduled hearing for this appeal. The appellant did not call at the time of the hearing, nor did they request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not call at the time of the hearing.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advises parties of the date and time of hearing. It also states:

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

YOU MUST CALL the toll-free number: **866-783-7021** at the time of the hearing. When instructed, enter the PIN Number . . . followed by the pound key [#] and wait for the administrative law judge to begin the hearing.

The administrative law judge **WILL NOT** call you for the hearing, you **MUST** call into the number provided above to participate. **Failure to participate in the hearing may result in the dismissal of your appeal.**

The back page of the hearing notice provides further hearing instructions stating, "You must call the toll-free number on the front of this notice at the time of the hearing to participate." This information also appears on the hearing notice in Spanish.

An insert was sent along with the hearing notice stating:

ATTENTION!

Instructions for participating in a hearing have changed.

Please review the enclosed hearing notice carefully and follow the instructions on how to join the call on the scheduled day and time of the hearing.

As a courtesy to the appellant, the record was left open for a minimum of 15 minutes after the hearing start time to give the appellant a reasonable opportunity to participate. This reasonable amount of time is appropriate because if a hearing were conducted with the non-appealing party alone it would have likely concluded in 15 minutes or less.

The unemployment insurance decision stated that the claimant was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The Iowa Administrative Procedures 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.

The Agency rules at Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(7) provides:

If a party has not responded to a notice of telephone hearing by providing the appeals bureau with the names and telephone numbers of the persons who are participating in the hearing by the scheduled starting time of the hearing or is not available at the telephone number provided, the presiding officer may proceed with the hearing. If the appealing party fails to provide a telephone number or is unavailable for the hearing, the presiding officer may decide the appealing party is in default and dismiss the appeal as provide in Iowa Code section 17A.12(3). The record 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 responds to the hearing notice while the hearing is in progress, the presiding officer shall pause to admit the party, summarize the hearing to that point, administer the oath, and resume the hearing.

b. If a party responds to the notice of hearing after the record has been closed and any party which has participated is no longer on the telephone line, the presiding officer shall not take the evidence of the late party.

c. Failure to read or follow the instructions on the notice of hearing shall not constitute good cause for reopening the record.

Due process requires notice and an opportunity to be heard, both of which were provided to the parties. The appellant is responsible for going forward with the case in a prompt and thoughtful manner. The appellant must be present at the start of the hearing to avoid a default judgement. Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(7).

The hearing notice instructs the parties to read the hearing notice and call the number listed for the hearing. If these instructions are not followed, the appealing party must show it intended to proceed with the appeal and took steps to do so, but failed to appear because of some misunderstanding, accident, mistake, or excusable neglect. The Iowa Supreme Court has held a default decision should be upheld when the absence of the appellant was due to the appellant's negligence, carelessness, or inattention. See *Houlihan v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 545 N.W.2d 863 (Iowa 1996). Similarly, a default should be upheld when the appellant has ignored clear requirements in the rules.

In this case, the appellant was not present at the start of the hearing. As a courtesy to allow for any misunderstandings or mistakes, the appellant was granted additional time not required by statute or rule. However, the appellant did not call in for the hearing during the additional time allotted. Therefore, the appellant is in default, the appeal is dismissed, and the representative's decision remains in force and effect.

Pursuant to the rule, the appellant may make a written request to the administrative law judge that the hearing be reopened but must do so 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, whose address is listed at the top right caption.

DECISION:

The October 11, 2021, reference 01, unemployment insurance decision denying benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed.



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

December 21, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

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