

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

JOSE R NUNEZ
Claimant

APPEAL 20A-UI-09571-DG-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**IOWA WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**OC: 07/19/20
Claimant: Appellant (6)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(13) – Disqualification due to Outstanding Fraud Overpayment
Iowa Code § 96.16(4) – Offenses and Misrepresentation
Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) – Default Decision
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) – Dismissal of Appeal on Default

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant/appellant, filed an appeal from the July 29, 2020 (reference 01) Iowa Workforce Development (“IWD”) unemployment insurance decision which concluded the claimant was ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits due to an outstanding fraud overpayment balance.

Notice of the hearing was mailed to the claimant’s last known address of record for a telephone hearing to be held on September 25, 2020. A review of the Appeals Bureau’s conference call system indicates that the appellant was not available at the telephone number provided for the scheduled hearing and no hearing was held.

ISSUE:

Should the appeal be dismissed based on the claimant/appellant’s failure to appear and participate?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The parties were properly notified of the scheduled hearing for this appeal. The appellant was not available at the telephone number provided for the scheduled hearing. He did request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice, but his request was not timely and it was denied. No hearing was held. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not answer when called at the phone number provided at registration.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advised the parties:

FRI SEP 25, 2020
1:30 PM

Date
Iowa Time

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

YOU MUST PROVIDE YOUR PHONE NUMBER TO THE APPEALS BUREAU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. If you do not follow these instructions, the judge will not call you for the hearing. You must also provide the name(s) and phone number(s) of any witnesses to the Appeals Bureau.

The back page of the hearing notice provides further instruction and warning in both languages:
If you do not participate in the hearing, the judge may dismiss the appeal or issue a decision without considering your evidence. The Appeals Bureau does not have a phone number for this hearing unless you provide it to us by following the instructions on the other side of this page. If you do not follow those instructions, the judge will not call you for the hearing. 871 IAC 26.14(7)

As a *courtesy* to the appellant the record was left open for a minimum grace period of 15 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 15-minute window after the hearing start time is reasonable.

The agency's decision concluded the claimant was ineligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits due to an outstanding fraud overpayment balance.

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.**

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 provided in Iowa Code § 17A.12(3). The record may be reopened if the absent party makes a request to reopen the hearing in writing 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.** (Emphasis added.)

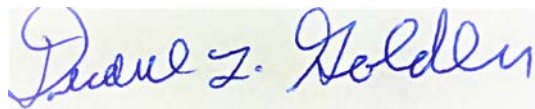
The Iowa Supreme Court has opined that a default should not be set aside for ordinary negligence or want of ordinary care. Defaults should not be set aside where the movant ignores plain instruction with ample opportunity to comply. See *Houlihan v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 545 N.W.2d 863 (Iowa 1996). Here, the clear directive is to read the hearing notice and register a telephone number where the party can be reached for the hearing. The second part of that directive is to be available at the number provided at the date and time of the hearing. Further, if the party misses or does not receive the hearing call, he or she may call the telephone numbers on the hearing notice. Due process requires notice and an opportunity to be heard, both of which were provided to each party. *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.*

The claimant/appellant appealed the unemployment insurance decision but failed to be available to participate in the scheduled hearing. The appellant has therefore defaulted on his appeal pursuant to Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.14(7), and the decision remains in force and effect.

Note to Claimant: This decision determines you are not eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits. If you disagree with this decision you may file an appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by following the instructions on the first page of this decision. Individuals who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits due to disqualifying separations, but who are currently unemployed for reasons related to COVID-19 may qualify for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). **You will need to apply for PUA to determine your eligibility under the program.** Additional information on how to apply for PUA can be found at <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/pua-information>.

DECISION:

The claimant/appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed. The unemployment insurance decision dated July 29, 2020, (reference 01) is affirmed. The claimant/appellant, is ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits due to an outstanding fraud overpayment balance.



Duane L. Golden
Administrative Law Judge

September 28, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

dlg/scn