

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

GABRIEL HANSEN
Claimant

APPEAL 21A-UI-14835-SN-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**IOWA WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

OC: 12/27/20
Claimant: Appellant (6)

Iowa Code § 96.6(2) – Timeliness of Appeal
Iowa Code § 96.4(3) – Ability to and Availability for Work
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22 – Able & Available - Benefits Eligibility Conditions
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 June 29, 2021, Gabriel Hanen (claimant/appellant) filed an appeal from the June 7, 2021, reference 01, unemployment insurance decision that concluded he was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. Notices of hearing were mailed to the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for September 16, 2021, at 8:00 a.m. 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 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. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not answer when called at the number provided at registration.

At 5:30 p.m. on September 15, 2021, Executive Director Cindy Hanen requested that the hearing scheduled for the following morning at 8:00 a.m. be rescheduled due to a follow up doctor's appointment. Ms. Hanen identified herself as the claimant's employer. Ms. Hanen was registered as a witness for the hearing, but Iowa Workforce Development did not have anything from the claimant identifying her as his representative. In fact, the claimant's appeal letter identifies the claimant as his own representative.

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

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:

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)

The information quoted above also appears on the hearing notice in Spanish.

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. Allowing additional time would prejudice the non-appealing party for appearing in a timely manner.

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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.8(3), (4) and (5) provide:

Withdrawals, dismissals, and postponements.

(3) If, for good cause, a party, having received due notice, is unable to attend a hearing or request postponement within the prescribed time, the presiding officer may, if no decision has been issued, reopen the record and, with notice to all parties, schedule another hearing. If a decision has been issued, the decision may be vacated upon the presiding officer's own motion or at the request of a party within 15 days after the mailing date of the decision and in the absence of an appeal to the employment appeal board of the department of inspections and appeals. If a decision is vacated, notice shall be given to all parties of a new hearing to be held and decided by another presiding officer. Once a decision has become final as provided by statute, the presiding officer has no jurisdiction to reopen the record or vacate the decision.

"Good cause" for purposes of this rule is defined as an emergency circumstance that is beyond the control of the party and that prevents the party from being able to participate in the hearing. **Examples of good cause include, but are not limited to, death, sudden illness, or accident involving the party or the party's immediate family (spouse, partner, children, parents, sibling) or other circumstances evidencing an emergency situation which was beyond the party's control and was not reasonably foreseeable.** Examples of circumstances that do not constitute good cause include, but are not limited to, a lost or misplaced notice of hearing, confusion as to the date and time for the hearing, failure to follow the directions on the notice of hearing, oversleeping, or other acts demonstrating a lack of due care by the party.

(4) A request to reopen a record or vacate a decision must be made in writing. If necessary, the presiding officer may hear, ex parte, additional information regarding the request for reopening. The granting or denial of such a request may be used as a grounds for appeal to the employment appeal board of the department of inspections and appeals upon the issuance of the presiding officer's final decision in the case.

(5) If good cause for postponement or reopening has not been shown, the presiding officer shall make a decision based upon whatever evidence is properly in the record.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.6(7) and (8) provide:

(7) Any party may appear in any proceeding. Any partnership, corporation, or association may be represented by any of its members, officers, or a duly authorized representative. Any party may appear by, or be represented by, an attorney-at-law or a duly authorized representative of an interested party.

(8) Where a party not attending the hearing will be represented by another person, such person shall submit written proof of such representation, signed by the party such person purports to represent, at least three days before the hearing to the presiding officer.

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:

1. Read the hearing notice.
2. Register a telephone number where the party can be reached for the hearing.
3. Be available at that number at the date and time of 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 contact the Appeals Bureau during the additional time allotted.

As for the request by Ms. Hanken, the administrative law judge is denying that request for postponement for several reasons. At the outset, the administrative law judge wants to emphasize this is a legal proceeding and there are rules and procedures that must be followed.

First, Iowa Workforce Development never received written proof that Ms. Hanken was acting on the claimant's behalf as his representative per Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.6(7) and (8). This is necessary because due process requires a party to have control over the information provided to the trier of fact.

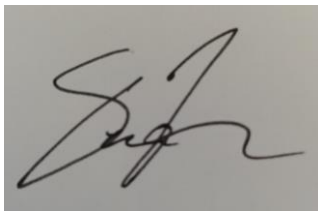
Second, Ms. Hanken's request is not a good cause reason for postponement as outlined in Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.8(3), (4) and (5). The request states that the claimant was meeting with his physician for a follow up visit at 8:30 a.m. This follow up visit was likely scheduled well in advance and the administrative law judge was only notified of its occurrence the day before the date of the hearing. There is certainly nothing in Ms. Hanken's request to suggest this appointment was due to the onset of a sudden illness or anything that was not reasonable foreseeable. Furthermore, this is a single party appeal that likely would have been completed in the thirty minutes prior to the claimant's doctor's visit. Instead, this request has all of the hallmarks of acts demonstrating lack of care by the party.

Third, the claimant was not even available at his phone to explain Ms. Hanken's rationale for a postponement. The administrative law judge called the claimant to get more information about this doctor's appointment to give him the ability to explain the deficiencies in the request. In her request, Ms. Hanken declared the claimant would not be available even to take a call. The claimant did not even answer his phone to explain his reason for postponement.

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 June 7, 2021, reference 01, unemployment insurance decision denying benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed.



Sean M. Nelson
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax (515) 725-9067

September 17, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

smn/mn