

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

MICHELLE M RULON
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 14A-UI-08206-MT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

COTTAGE CAFE & SHOPS INC
Employer

OC: 07/06/14
Claimant: Respondent (6)

Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) – Default Decision
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) – Dismissal of Appeal on Default

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

An appeal was filed from a representative's unemployment insurance decision dated July 31, 2014 (reference 02) that concluded claimant was 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 August 28, 2014. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant (employer) failed to respond to the hearing notice and provide a telephone number at which the appellant could be reached for the hearing and did not participate in the hearing. Based on the appellant's failure to participate in the hearing and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law and decision.

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 failed to provide a telephone number at which the appellant could be reached for the hearing and did not participate in the hearing or request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice. Official notice of the Clear 2 There hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not call the appeals bureau to provide a telephone number and name of a representative.

The hearing notice instructions specifically advise parties, "If you do not participate in the hearing because you do not register for the hearing, register late, or cannot be reached at the number you provided when the judge calls for the hearing, the appeal may be dismissed or decided based on other available evidence."

The record was left open, as a courtesy to appellant, for a minimum of 15 minutes after the hearing start time to give the appellant 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 concluded in 15 minutes or less. Allowing additional time would prejudice the non-appealing party for appearing in a timely manner. The 15-minute wait time is also a reasonable period to hold the record open as insufficient time would remain to conduct a quality due process hearing in the time allotted by the appeals bureau. Each two party hearing is allowed 60 minutes and a one party hearing allowed 30 minutes. Holding appellant in default for failure to appear and participate during a 15-minute window after the hearing start time is entirely reasonable considering the time allocated for unemployment hearings.

The representative's decision had concluded that the claimant was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

At the NAUIAP Conference the week of June 22, 2014 an Appeals Bureau ALJ conducted an informal, random survey of state unemployment appeal departments about the courtesy wait time before default for parties who do not call or appear in response to hearing notice instructions: West Virginia, Texas, and Indiana 5 minutes; Mississippi and Arkansas 10 minutes; Minnesota 10 to 15 minutes; Wisconsin, Michigan, Delaware, Connecticut, and North Carolina 15 minutes.

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) provide:

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 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. Instead, the presiding officer shall inquire ex parte as to why the party was late in responding to the notice of hearing. For good cause shown, the presiding officer shall reopen the record and cause further notice of hearing to be issued to all parties of record. The record shall not be reopened if the presiding officer does not find good cause for the party's late response to the notice of hearing.
- c. Failure to read or follow the instructions on the notice of hearing shall not constitute good cause for reopening the record.

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 mandates with ample opportunity to abide. See Houlihan v. Emp't Appeal Bd., 545 N.W.2d 863 (Iowa 1996). Here the plain and simple mandate is to read the hearing notice and call in a telephone number where the party can be reached. The second simple and obvious mandate is to be available at the number provided. Lastly, the third mandate is to call in within five minutes if the party misses the call.

Due process requires notice and an opportunity to be heard, both of which were provided to the parties. This rule does not provide exceptions for good intentions and/or a party contacting the Appeals Bureau within a reasonable amount of time after the hearing is scheduled. It can be assumed an appellant intends to participate in the hearing simply by the fact an appeal is filed, but their responsibility does not end there and all parties are required to follow the specific written instructions printed on the hearing notice. Due process does not require the non-appealing party and the Unemployment Appeals Insurance Bureau to sit and wait for indefinite periods see if an appellant wants to prosecute the appeal. The appellant filed the appeal and is held solely responsible for going forward with the case in an expeditious manner. The rule holds appellant in default if not present at the start of hearing. As a courtesy, appellant was granted additional time not required by statute or rule. Here, notwithstanding additional time, notice and opportunity, the appellant failed to prosecute the case expeditiously and as such the appellant is in default and the appeal shall be dismissed. Iowa Code §17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 24.14(7). The representative's decision remains in force and effect.

Pursuant to the rule, 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, whose address is listed at the top right caption.

DECISION:

The representative's decision dated July 31, 2014 (reference 02) is affirmed. Appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed. The decision granting benefits remains in effect.

Marlon Mormann
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax 515-242-5144

Decision Dated and Mailed

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