IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU

ROBERT K POHLMAN Claimant **PILOT TRAVEL CENTERS LLC** Employer	**APPEAL 21A-UI-17139-DG-T** **ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE DECISION** **OC: 05/09/21** **Claimant: Respondent (6)**

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Employer/appellant filed an appeal from the July 29, 2021 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that concluded claimant was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. Notice of hearing was mailed to the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for September 28, 2021. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant failed to respond to the hearing notice instructions and register a telephone number at which it could be reached 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 failed to register a telephone number at which it could be reached for the scheduled hearing or request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice so no hearing was held. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not follow the hearing notice instructions in advance of the scheduled hearing to call or register online with the Appeals Bureau to provide a telephone number and/or name of a representative.

The front of the hearing notice instruction specifically advises in English and Spanish:

TUE SEP 28, 2021	Date
10:00 AM	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. Allowing additional time would prejudice the non-appealing party for appearing in a timely manner. Holding the appellant in default for failure to appear and participate during a 15-minute window after the hearing start time is reasonable.

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

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The Iowa Administrative Procedure Act at Iowa Code section 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(7) provides:

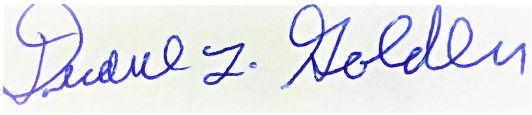
> **Conduct of hearings.**
>
> **(7)** If a party has not responded to a notice of telephone hearing by providing the appeals bureau with the names and telephone numbers of the persons who are participating in the hearing by the scheduled starting time of the hearing or is not available at the telephone 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.

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, the party has telephone numbers on the hearing notice at which to inquire. 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.* 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. Each party 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 15-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(7). The unemployment insurance decision remains in force and effect.

***Note to Claimant*:** If this decision determines you are not eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits and 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, 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. If this decision becomes final, or if you are not eligible for PUA, you may have an overpayment of benefits.

DECISION:

The July 29, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision allowing benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default.



Duane L. Golden
Administrative Law Judge

September 30, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

dlg/kmj