

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

OCTAVIA ATKINS

Claimant

APPEAL 21A-UI-25569-B2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

DES MOINES IND COMMUNITY SCH DIST

Employer

OC: 08/16/20

Claimant: Appellant (6)

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.23(26) – Part-Time Worker – Same Wages and Hours

Iowa Code § 96.4-3 – Able and Available

Iowa Code § 96.7(2)A(2) – Partial Benefits

Iowa Code § 96.1(A)(37) – Total and Partial Unemployment

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 October 18, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that concluded claimant was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. Notices of hearing were mailed to the party's last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for January 18, 2022. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant failed to call in to the hearing at the proper time at the number listed. Because the claimant/appellant failed to follow the instructions on the notice of hearing, no hearing was held. However, official notice was taken of the administrative record, as it relates to benefits claimant has received to date.

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 call in to the hearing at the proper time using the number listed on the hearing notice. Appellant did not request a postponement of the hearing before the hearing date. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not call in to the hearing at the number listed at number and time listed. The appellant did not call in before the record was closed, 15 minutes after the hearing was scheduled to begin.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advises parties in English and Spanish:

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

YOU MUST CALL the toll free number: **866-733-7021** 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 dismissal of your appeal.**

The hearing notice lists the hearing date of January 18, 2022 and the hearing time as 11:00 a.m. Iowa time.

The record was left open for a grace period 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 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 the 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 unemployment insurance decision had concluded 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) 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 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:

1. Read the hearing notice.
2. Call in the toll free number at the time of the hearing.
3. Enter a PIN Number followed by the pound key.

The Iowa Supreme Court has held a default should not be set aside 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 not be set aside because the appellant has ignored clear requirements in the rules. Rather, a 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 appellant was not present at the start of the hearing. As a *courtesy*, appellant was granted additional time not required by statute or rule. The representative's decision remains in force and effect.

DECISION:

The October 18, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision denying benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed.



Blair A. Bennett
Administrative Law Judge

February 9, 2022
Decision Dated and Mailed

bab/mh