

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

JO ANN L LEHS
Claimant

DOLGENCORP LLC
Employer

APPEAL 17A-UI-06443-JP

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 05/21/17
Claimant: Respondent (6)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer/Representative Participation Fact-finding Interview
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 June 16, 2017, (reference 02) 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 hearing to be held at 1000 East Grand Avenue, in Des Moines, Iowa, at 9:00 a.m. on July 21, 2017. The employer/appellant failed to appear in response to the hearing notice instruction and no hearing was held. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant also did not register a telephone number at which it could be reached for the scheduled hearing.

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 respond to the hearing notice instruction and appear for the scheduled hearing at 1000 East Grand Avenue, in Des Moines, Iowa, and did not request a postponement of the hearing.

The appellant also failed to provide a telephone number at which it could be reached for the scheduled hearing. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not 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:

IN-PERSON HEARING:

FRI JUL 21, 2017
9:00 AM

Date
Iowa Time

Location:

1000 EAST GRAND AVE
DES MOINES, IOWA 50319-0209

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 or witness(es).

As a *courtesy* to the appellant the record was left open for a minimum of 30 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 30 minutes or less. 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 30-minute window after the hearing start time is reasonable.

The representative's decision had concluded that the claimant was 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(6) provide:

If one or more parties which have received notice for a contested case hearing fail to appear at the time and place of an in-person hearing, the presiding officer may proceed with the hearing. If the appealing party fails to appear, the presiding officer may decide the party is in default and dismiss the appeal. The hearing 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 arrives for an in-person hearing while the hearing is in session, the presiding officer shall pause to admit the party, summarize the hearing to that point, administer the oath, and resume the hearing.

- b. If an absent party arrives for an in-person hearing after the record has been closed and after any party which had participated in the hearing has departed, the presiding officer shall not take the evidence of the late party.

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 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 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 appear at the in-person location to participate. Furthermore, the parties are provided the Appeals Bureau's contact information on the back page of the hearing notice. 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. The appellant filed the appeal and is held solely responsible for going forward with the case in an expeditious and deliberate manner. The appellant failed to appear to participate in the hearing. The appellant also did not contact the Appeals Bureau to participate in the hearing. 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 promptly and as such the appellant is in default and the appeal shall be dismissed. Iowa Code § 17A.12(3); Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(6); and Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(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 June 16, 2017, (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision allowing benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed.

Jeremy Peterson
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax 515-478-3528

Decision Dated and Mailed

jp/rvs