

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

**LAURENE M LUNTONDA**

Claimant

**APPEAL 20A-UI-02563-DB-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**WHIRLPOOL CORPORATION**

Employer

**OC: 11/24/19**

**Claimant: Appellant (6)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct  
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment  
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, Laurene M. Luntonda, filed an appeal from the March 17, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that concluded she was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits due to a discharge from work on February 26, 2020. A notice of hearing was mailed to each of the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for April 23, 2020. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant failed to respond to the hearing notice and provide a telephone number at which she could be reached for the scheduled hearing. Because the claimant/appellant failed to follow the instructions on the notice of hearing, no hearing was held. Official notice was taken of the administrative record as it relates to benefits claimant has been paid to date.

**ISSUES:**

Should the appeal be dismissed based on the appellant's failure to appear and participate?  
Is the claimant overpaid benefits?

**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 she could be reached for the scheduled hearing as required by the hearing notice. She 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 or register online with the Appeals Bureau to provide a telephone number and/or name of a representative before the date and time the hearing was scheduled. 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 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.

The hearing notice lists the hearing date of THU APR 23, 2020 and the hearing time as 9:00 a.m. Iowa time. The back page of the hearing notice provides further warning in both languages:

You must register a phone number for each hearing by following the instructions on the front of this notice.

...

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 use 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.

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 March 17, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision had concluded that the claimant was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. Despite being denied benefits in the original decision, Iowa Workforce Development made a decision to release funds of claimants while their appeals were pending due to the backlog in appeals caused by the recent COVID 19 outbreak. Claimant was one of the individuals whose funds were released pending appeal. The administrative record shows, claimant filed for and has been paid a total of \$1,365.00 in unemployment insurance benefits for the weeks between March 15, 2020 and April 4, 2020 following this disqualifying separation from employment.

**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). There 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.

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.

As claimant has received benefits, pending a determination on the appeal, the next issue in this case is whether the claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits.

Iowa Code § 96.3(7) provides, in pertinent part:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

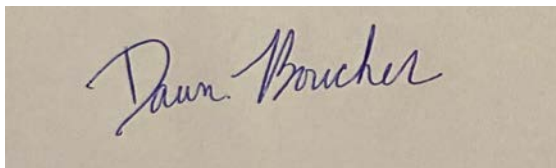
a. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

The administrative law judge concludes that the claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits of \$1,365.00 in unemployment insurance benefits for the weeks between March 15, 2020 and April 4, 2020 pursuant to Iowa Code § 96.3(7) as the disqualification decision that created the overpayment decision is affirmed.

**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 due to disqualifying separations, 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>.

**DECISION:**

The March 17, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision denying benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed. The claimant was overpaid \$1,365.00 in unemployment insurance benefits for the weeks between March 15, 2020 and April 4, 2020, which must be repaid to the department. Those benefits may be recovered in accordance with Iowa law.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dawn Boucher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Dawn Boucher  
Administrative Law Judge  
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau  
1000 East Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209  
Fax (515) 478-3528

April 24, 2020  
Decision Dated and Mailed

db/scn