

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

CHERI L WESTPHAL
Claimant

TOM LOVELACE COMPANY LLC
Employer

APPEAL 20A-UI-00402-JC-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 12/08/19
Claimant: Respondent (6)**

Iowa Code § 96.6(2) – Timeliness of Protest
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 employer filed an appeal from the December 31, 2019, (reference 03) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits and concluded the employer failed to file a timely protest to the notice of claim.

Notice of the hearing was mailed to the employer's last known address of record for a telephone hearing to be held at 9:00 a.m. on February 3, 2020. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system after 9:15 a.m. the same day shows the employer/appellant failed to respond to the hearing notice instruction and provide a telephone number at which it could be reached for the scheduled hearing.

The administrative law judge located a phone number listed on the employer's appeal letter and attempted to call Jenn Adamson at the number provided in the employer appeal letter. She did not respond, and a voicemail was provided, directing the employer to call the Appeals Bureau immediately if it wanted to participate in the hearing. A grace period was extended to allow it to respond before the record was closed. No hearing was held.

ISSUE:

Should the appeal be dismissed based on the employer/appellant's failure to appear and participate?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The employer/appellant was properly notified of the scheduled hearing for this appeal. The employer/appellant failed to register a telephone number to be called at the time scheduled for this appeal hearing as required by the hearing notice. The employer/appellant did not request a postponement of the hearing. No hearing was held.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advised the parties:

Date: MON FEB 03
Iowa Time: 9:00 a.m.

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 back page of the hearing notice provides further instruction and warning:

Register/Appeal Hearing Procedure

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

Failure to Participate

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, the administrative law judge attempted to call the employer at a phone number listed on its appeal letter, but the employer representative was unavailable when called and did not respond to the voicemail, directing her contact the Appeals Bureau to participate.

The agency's decision concluded that the claimant was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits and the employer failed to file a timely protest.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The Iowa Administrative Procedure 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.**

Agency rules at Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(7) provides:

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 in writing 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.** (Emphasis added.)

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, he or she may call the telephone numbers on the hearing notice. 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.*

The employer appealed the unemployment insurance decision but failed to be available to participate in the scheduled hearing. The employer/appellant has therefore defaulted on its appeal pursuant to Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.14(7), and the decision remains in force and effect.

If the appellant disagrees with this decision, a written request to reopen the record must be made to the administrative law judge within 15 days after the mailing date of this decision. The 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 the scheduled time.

DECISION:

The employer/appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed. The unemployment insurance decision dated December 31, 2019, (reference 03) allowing benefits remains in effect.

Jennifer L. Beckman
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
Iowa Workforce Development
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax 515-478-3528

Decision Dated and Mailed

jlb/scn