

441—7.18(17A) Ex parte communication.

7.18(1) Prohibited communication. There shall be no written, oral, or other type of communication between the presiding officer and any party or representative of any party or any other person with a direct or indirect interest in the case while an appeal is pending, without all parties being notified of an opportunity to participate, unless specifically authorized by statute or rule.

a. This provision does not prevent the presiding officer from communicating with members of the agency or seeking the advice or help of persons other than those defined in paragraph “*c.*”

b. Persons described in paragraph “*c.*” shall not directly or indirectly communicate to the presiding officer any ex parte communications they have received of a type that the presiding officer would be prohibited from receiving or that furnish, augment, diminish, or modify the evidence in the record.

c. For purposes of this rule:

(1) People with a direct or indirect interest in a case include any member of the appeals advisory committee and any person engaged in personally investigating, prosecuting, or advocating in either the case under appeal or a pending factually related case involving the same parties.

(2) The term “personally investigating” means taking affirmative steps to interview witnesses directly or to obtain documents or other information directly. The term does not include general direction and supervision of assigned investigators, unsolicited receipt of information which is relayed to assigned investigators, review of another person’s investigative work product in the course of determining whether there is probable cause to initiate a proceeding, or exposure to factual information while performing other agency functions, including fact gathering for purposes other than investigation of the matter which culminates in a contested case.

7.18(2) Commencement of prohibition. Prohibitions on ex parte communications commence with the issuance of the notice of hearing in a contested case and continue for as long as the case is pending.

7.18(3) When communication is ex parte. Rescinded IAB 4/30/03, effective 7/1/03.

7.18(4) Avoidance of ex parte communication. To avoid prohibited ex parte communications, notice must be given in a manner reasonably calculated to give all parties a fair opportunity to participate. Written communications shall be provided to all parties to the appeal.

7.18(5) Communications not prohibited. Communications with the presiding officer involving uncontested scheduling or procedural matters do not require notice or opportunity for parties to participate. Parties should notify other parties prior to initiating such contact with the presiding officer when feasible, and shall notify other parties when seeking to continue hearings or other deadlines.

7.18(6) Disclosure of prohibited communications. A presiding officer who receives a prohibited ex parte communication during the pendency of a contested case must initially determine if the effect of the communication is so prejudicial that the presiding officer should be disqualified from the case. If the presiding officer determines that disqualification is warranted, a copy of any prohibited written communication, all written responses to the communication, a written summary stating the substance of any prohibited oral or other communication not available in written form for disclosure, all responses made, and the identity of each person from whom the presiding officer received a prohibited ex parte communication shall be disclosed. If the presiding officer determines that disqualification is not warranted, such documents shall be submitted for inclusion in the record and served on all parties. Any party desiring to rebut the prohibited communication must be allowed the opportunity to do so upon written request filed within ten days after notice of communication.

7.18(7) Disclosure of prior receipt of information through ex parte communication. Promptly after being assigned to serve as presiding officer at any stage in a contested case proceeding, a presiding officer shall disclose to all parties material factual information received through ex parte communication prior to such assignment unless the factual information has already been or shortly will be disclosed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.13(2) or through discovery. Factual information contained in an investigative report or similar document need not be separately disclosed by the presiding officer as long as such documents have been or will shortly be provided to the parties.

7.18(8) Imposition of sanctions. The presiding officer may render a proposed or final decision imposing appropriate sanctions for violations of this rule, including default, a decision against the offending party, censure, or suspension or revocation of the privilege to practice before the agency.

Violation of ex parte communication prohibitions by department personnel shall be reported to the department for possible sanctions, including censure, suspension, dismissal, or other disciplinary action.