

561—7.9(17A,455A) Separation of functions and ex parte communications.

7.9(1) *Separation of functions.* A staff attorney for the department shall perform the investigative and prosecuting functions for the department. Additional employees of the department may be designated by the director to perform these functions as necessary during the course of the case. No person performing these functions shall participate or advise in any decision arising out of that case except as witness or counsel in public proceedings.

7.9(2) *Communications initiated by administrative law judge or agency member.*

a. Except as provided in paragraphs 7.9(2)“*b*” and “*c*,” or unless required for the disposition of ex parte matters specifically authorized by statute, following issuance of the notice of hearing, the presiding officer and members of the agency having jurisdiction of the case shall not communicate, directly or indirectly, in connection with any issue of fact or law in that case with any person or party or representative of any party, or any other person with a direct or indirect interest in such case. Persons who jointly act as presiding officer in a pending contested case may communicate with each other without notice or opportunity for parties to participate to the extent permitted or allowed by Iowa Code chapter 21, “Official Meetings Open to Public (Open Meetings).”

b. The presiding officer having jurisdiction of a case may communicate in connection with issues of fact or law in the case, upon notice and opportunity for all parties to participate. Where members of the agency are acting as the presiding officer(s), they may communicate in connection with issues of fact or law in the case, upon notice and opportunity for all parties to participate and to the extent permitted by Iowa Code chapter 21, “Official Meetings Open to Public (Open Meetings).” Notice of the time and place of the discussion and the issues of fact or law to be discussed shall be delivered by first-class mail to the parties. The discussion shall not extend to issues of fact or law not specified in the notice unless all parties participate in the discussion. The time of the discussion shall not be sooner than ten days after receipt of the notice.

c. The presiding officer or members of the agency having jurisdiction of the case may communicate with members of the department and may have the aid and advice of persons other than those with a personal interest in, or those engaged in personally investigating, prosecuting or advocating in, either the case under consideration or a pending factually related case involving the same parties, as long as those persons do 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. All employees of the department other than those performing the investigative and prosecuting functions in the case shall be available to advise the agency and presiding officer on any of those employees’ functions relating to the case and any appeal, provided communications with those employees meet the above specifications.

7.9(3) *Communications initiated by parties.*

a. Unless required for the disposition of ex parte matters specifically authorized by statute, parties, including the department, or their representatives in a case, and persons with a direct or indirect interest in such a case, shall not communicate directly or indirectly in connection with any issue of fact or law in that case with the presiding officer or members of the agency having jurisdiction of the case, except upon notice and opportunity for all parties to participate, as provided in paragraph 7.9(2)“*b*.”

b. 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.

c. The presiding officer or members of the agency shall refuse to discuss issues of fact or law with parties unless notice and opportunity for hearing has been given to all parties. A copy of any written ex parte communication or summary of oral ex parte communication received from a party, which directly or indirectly relates to any issue of fact or law in the case, shall be transmitted by the presiding officer to the other parties, and the presiding officer shall include the written communication or summary in the record.

d. 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.

e. The presiding officer may require the recipient of a prohibited communication to submit the communication if written or a summary of the communication if oral for inclusion in the record of the proceedings.

f. The presiding officer may render a proposed or final decision imposing appropriate sanctions, including default, for violations of rule 561—7.9(17A,455A); make a decision against the offending party; or censure, suspend or revoke the privilege to practice before the agency.