

**871—26.10(17A,96) Ex parte communications.**

**26.10(1)** An ex parte communication is an oral or written communication relating directly to the facts or legal questions at issue in a contested case proceeding which is made by a party to the presiding officer to whom the case has been assigned without the knowledge or outside the presence of the other parties and with the object of affecting the outcome of the case.

**26.10(2)** Ex parte communication does not include:

- a. Statements given by the parties to representatives of the department for use in making the initial determination;
- b. Statements contained in a party's appeal from the initial determination;
- c. Statements relating only to procedural or scheduling matters, such as requests for discovery, subpoenas, postponements or withdrawals of appeals;
- d. Requests for clarification of a legal issue involved in a contested case, but only to the extent of requesting information on the applicable law sections and not as to matters of fact.

**26.10(3)** Unless required for the disposition of ex parte matters specifically authorized by statute, no party or its representative shall communicate directly or indirectly with the presiding officer to whom a contested case is assigned, nor shall the presiding officer communicate directly or indirectly with a party or its representative concerning any issue of fact or law in a contested case unless:

a. Each party or its representative is given written notification of the communication. Such notification shall contain a summary of the communication, if oral, or a copy of the communication, if written, as well as the time, place and means of the communication.

b. After notification, all parties have the right, upon written demand, to respond to the ex parte communication, including the right to be present and heard if an oral communication has not been completed. If the communication is written, or if oral and completed, all other parties have the right, upon written demand, to a special hearing to respond to the ex parte communication.

c. Whether or not any party requests the opportunity to respond to an ex parte communication made in violation of Iowa Code section 17A.17(2) as amended by 1998 Iowa Acts, chapter 1202, section 19, the presiding officer shall include such communication in the official record of the contested case.

**26.10(4)** 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.

**26.10(5)** 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.

**26.10(6)** 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 as to require the presiding officer's recusal. If the presiding officer determines that recusal 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 submitted for inclusion in the record under seal by protective order or disclosed. If the presiding officer determines that recusal 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 the communication.

**26.10(7)** 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 material has already been or shortly will be disclosed. 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 shortly will be provided to the parties.

**26.10(8)** The presiding officer may impose appropriate sanctions for violations of this rule, including dismissal of an appellant's contested case, 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 agency personnel shall be reported to the chief administrative law judge for possible sanctions.