

**STATE OF ILLINOIS
ILLINOIS LABOR RELATIONS BOARD
STATE PANEL**

| | | |
|---|---|----------------------|
| American Federation of State, County, and |) | |
| Municipal Employees, Council 31, |) | |
| |) | |
| Charging Party |) | |
| |) | Case No. S-CA-14-033 |
| and |) | |
| |) | |
| Plainfield Park District, |) | |
| |) | |
| Respondent |) | |

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE’S RECOMMENDED DECISION AND ORDER

On August 29, 2013, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31 (Charging Party or AFSCME) filed a charge pursuant to Section 11 of the Illinois Public Labor Relations Act, 5 ILCS 315 (2012) as amended (Act), and the Rules and Regulations of the Illinois Labor Relations Board 80 Ill. Admin. Code, parts 1200 through 1240 (Rules) alleging that the Plainfield Park District (Respondent) violated Sections 10(a)(2) and (1) of the Act by interrogating Joel Schumaker and John Nickl concerning their involvement with the Union and the media, disciplining Schumaker for allegedly soliciting an individual on or about August 21, 2013 to become a member of the Union, assigning Schumaker duties different than the duties he had been assigned prior to the discipline, and terminating Schumaker from his position. The charges were investigated in accordance with Section 11 of the Act and, on November 26, 2013, the Executive Director of the Illinois Labor Relations Board (Board) issued a Complaint for Hearing. The Complaint contained the following statement:

RESPONDENT IS HEREBY NOTIFIED that pursuant to Section 1220.40(b) of the Rules and Regulations of the Illinois Labor Relations Board (Rules), it must file an answer to the complaint and serve a copy thereof upon the Charging Party within 15 days of the service of the complaint upon it. Said Answer shall include an express admission, denial, or explanation of each and every allegation of this complaint. **Failure to specifically respond to an allegation shall be deemed an affirmative admission of the facts or conclusions alleged in the allegation. Failure to timely file an answer shall be deemed an admission of all material facts or legal conclusions alleged, and a waiver of hearing. The filing of any motions or other pleadings will not stay the time for filing an answer.**

Section 1200.3(c) of the Rules provides that a document is presumed served on a party three days after it is mailed. Section 1200.30 of the Rules sets forth the manner in which the Board must calculate time limits. It provides that, “in computing any period of time prescribed by the Act or this Part, the designated period of time begins to run the day after the act, event, or default and ends on the last day of the period so computed.” 80 Ill. Admin. Code § 1200.30(a). Further, it states that “if the last day falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday, the time period shall be automatically extended to the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday.” *Id.* On these points, the Board’s rules are consistent with the Statute on Statutes. *Int’l Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 700 (Zicarelli)*, (IL LRB-LP July 19, 2013); 5 ILCS 70/1.11 (2010).¹ Service on Respondent was therefore presumed effective on Monday, December 2, 2013.²

Under Section 1220.40(b) of the Rules, Respondent was required to submit an answer to the complaint within 15 days of service. Thus, a timely answer should have been postmarked by Tuesday, December 17, 2013.

On December 23, 2013, the Respondent filed a Motion for Leave to File a Late Answer Instantly and for Variance of Rule 80 Ill. Admin Code 1220(b). Respondent’s counsel asserts that he calculated that the answer was due on December 23, 2013 because the complaint did not indicate whether the answer was due 15 business days after service of the complaint or 15 calendar days after its service. He further notes he reviewed the rules on December 23, 2013 and states that “it appears the 15 days may refer to calendar days.” The Respondent concedes that under this latter interpretation, the Respondent’s answer was six days late.

In support of its motion, Respondent argues there are extraordinary circumstances that warrant permitting the Respondent to file a late answer because the Charging Party has not sought a default judgment, the Board has not issued an Order to Show Cause or set a hearing date, and there is no prejudice from any delay. The Respondent further argues that it would be

¹ The Statute on Statutes provides as follows: “The time within which any act provided by law is to be done shall be computed by excluding the first day and including the last, unless the last day is Saturday or Sunday or is a holiday as defined or fixed in any statute now or hereafter in force in this State, and then it shall also be excluded. If the day succeeding such Saturday, Sunday or holiday is also a holiday or a Saturday or Sunday then such succeeding day shall also be excluded.” 5 ILCS 70/1.11 (2012).

² Under *City of St. Charles*, the addressee may rebut the presumption of service with sufficient evidence that actual delivery occurred at a later date. *City of St. Charles v. Ill. Labor Rel. Bd.*, 395 Ill. App. 3d 507 (2nd Dist. 2009). Respondent has not offered any evidence to rebut the presumption of service on December 2, 2013.

unduly burdensome to strictly apply the filing rule because the Respondent has not been permitted to submit its meritorious defense to the charge and could not reasonable do so during the holiday season when individuals are out of the office. The Respondent explains that it first learned of the termination allegation when it received the complaint and was never given an opportunity to provide its position on that allegation or a meritorious defense to it.³

For the same reasons, the Respondent argues that the Board should grant a variance from the rule requiring the Respondent to file an answer within fifteen days of the complaint's service.

On January 2, 2014, I received an email from the Charging Party's attorney stating that the Charging Party opposes the Respondent's motion and that the Charging Party had not yet received the Answer or Respondent's Motion for Leave for File a Late Answer.⁴ Further, he asserted that he informed the Respondent's attorney on December 27, 2013, by telephone, that the Charging Party would oppose the motion.

On January 7, 2014, the Charging Party filed a Motion for Default Judgment and a response to the Respondent's motions. The Charging Party asserts that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would warrant granting Respondent's motion for leave to file a late answer. Further, the Charging Party argues that the Respondent did not meet the requirements for obtaining a variance from the 15-day filing deadline. In support, the Charging Party asserts that Schumaker would be injured if the Board granted a variance because he lost his employment and any delay in resolving the unfair labor practice charge would cause additional harm. Further, the Charging Party notes that it did not unduly delay the proceeding before the Board because it filed a charge against the Respondent before Schumaker fully served his suspension, timely produced additional information after filing the charge, requested status updates from the Board concerning its investigation, informed the Board of Schumaker's subsequent discharge, and inquired about the Respondent's motion for leave for file a late answer immediately upon counsel's return from vacation.

³ The Respondent asks the Board for an additional 15 days to investigate this allegation.

⁴ The Respondent ultimately provided the Charging Party with its motion and the answer on January 7, 2014.

I. Discussion and Analysis

The Respondent has failed to show that extraordinary circumstances exist to allow for the late filing of an answer pursuant to Section 1220.40(b)(4), and Respondent's request for a variance pursuant to Section 1200.160 is denied.

Section 1220.40(b) of the Board's Rules provides that:

Whenever the Executive Director issues a complaint for hearing, the respondent shall file an answer within 15 days after service of the complaint and deliver a copy to the charging party by ordinary mail to the address set forth in the complaint. Answers shall be filed with the Board with attention to the designated Administrative Law Judge.

1) The answer shall include a specific admission, denial or explanation of each allegation or issue of the complaint or, if the respondent is without knowledge thereof, it shall so state and such statement shall operate as a denial. Admissions or denials may be made to all or part of an allegation but shall fairly meet the circumstances of the allegation.

2) The answer shall also include a specific, detailed statement of any affirmative defenses.

3) Parties who fail to file timely answers shall be deemed to have admitted the material facts and legal conclusions alleged in the complaint. The failure to answer any allegation shall be deemed an admission of that allegation. Failure to file an answer shall be cause for the termination of the proceeding and the entry of an order of default. Filing of a motion will not stay the time for filing an answer.

This rule has been strictly construed by the Board and courts, which have consistently held that a respondent's failure to timely file an answer to a complaint results in admissions of all allegations in the complaint and an entry of default judgment. Wood Dale Fire Prot. Dist. v. Ill-Labor Relations Bd., 395 Ill. App. 3d 523 (2nd Dist. 2009), aff' g Wood Dale Fire Prot. Dist., 25 PERI ¶ 136 (IL LRB-SP 2008); Metz v. Ill. State Labor Relations Bd., 231 Ill. App. 3d 1079 (5th Dist. 1992), aff' g Circuit Clerk of St. Clair Cnty, 6 PERI ¶ 2036 (IL SLRB 1990); Peoria Hous .

Auth., 11 PERI ¶ 2033 (IL SLRB 1995); Chicago Hous. Auth., 10 PERI ¶ 3010 (IL LLRB 1994); Cnty. of Jackson (Jackson Cnty. Nursing Home), 9 PERI ¶ 2025 (IL SLRB 1993); City of Springfield, Office of Pub. Utils., 9 PERI ¶ 2024 (IL SLRB 1993).

1. Leave to File a Late Answer

The Respondent's motion for Leave to File a Late Answer is denied because the Respondent has not demonstrated the existence of extraordinary circumstances which would warrant granting such a motion.

Section 1220.40(b)(4) of the Rules provides that "[l]eave to file a late answer shall only be granted by the Administrative Law Judge if the late filing is due to extraordinary circumstances, which will include among other things: fraud, act or concealment of the opposing party, or other grounds traditionally relied upon for equitable relief from judgments."

However, the failure of a party's legal representative to meet a deadline due to simple inattention or negligence does not constitute an extraordinary circumstance under Section 1220.40(b)(4). First Transit/River Valley Metro, 26 PERI ¶ 38 (IL LRB-SP 2010), aff'd by unpub. order, 27 PERI ¶ 61 (3rd Dist. 2011); City of Markham, 27 PERI ¶ 7 (IL LRB-SP 2011). Except in narrowly defined circumstances, negligence by a party's attorney does not shield it from the consequence of that negligence. Amalgamated Transit Union. Local 241, 29 PERI ¶ 78 (LRB-SP 2012) (citing Wood Dale, 25 PERI ¶ 1136 and Bd. of Educ. Thornton Twp. High Sch. Dist. No. 205 v. Ill. Educ. Labor Relations Bd., 235 Ill. App. 3d 724, 730-31 (4th Dist. 1992)).

Here, Respondent does not allege fraud, concealment, or other grounds traditionally relied upon for equitable relief from judgments. Rather, Respondent's attorney effectively admits that he filed a late answer because he failed to carefully review the Board's rules prior to the Answer's due date. As noted above, attorney inattention or negligence does not constitute an extraordinary circumstance which warrants granting the Respondent's motion for leave to file a late answer.

Similarly, Respondent's alleged unawareness of the termination allegation, at the time Respondent received the complaint, does not constitute extraordinary circumstances because the Respondent was not required to fully ascertain the veracity of the allegations prior to filing the Answer. In fact, the Rules permit a Respondent to assert that it is without knowledge of an allegation's truth or falsity. See Section 1220.40(b)(1) ("[t]he answer shall include a specific admission, denial or explanation of each allegation or issue of the complaint or, if the respondent

is without knowledge thereof, it shall so state and such statement shall operate as a denial.”). As such, if the Respondent did not have sufficient knowledge to admit, deny, or explain each allegation in the complaint, it could have so stated in its Answer.⁵

Thus, Respondent’s motion for leave to file a late answer is denied.

2. Request for a Variance

The Respondent’s request for a variance is denied because the Charging Party would be injured if the Board granted a variance and because the rule governing the filing of the Answer is not unreasonable or unnecessarily burdensome as it is applied here.

A variance of any provision of the Rules is permitted by Section 1200.160, which states the following:

The provisions of this part or 80 Ill. Adm. Code 1210, 1220 or 1230 may be waived by the Board when it finds that:

- a) The provision from which the variance is granted is not statutorily mandated;
- b) No party will be injured by the granting of the variance; and
- c) The rule from which the variance is granted would, in the particular case, be unreasonable or unnecessarily burdensome.

All three prongs must be satisfied for the variance to be entertained by the Board. However, even if all three prongs are met, granting a variance remains a matter of the Board’s discretion and not a matter of right by the party. City of Ottawa, 27 PERI ¶ 6 (IL LRB-SP 2011).

Here, the first requirement of Section 1200.160 is met because the 15-day filing rule in Section 1220.40(b) is not statutorily mandated. However, the second and third requirements are not satisfied.

First, AFSCME will be injured by the granting of the variance because the complaint alleges the Respondent terminated bargaining unit member Schumaker and both the Board and AFSCME diligently processed the claim. Here, any further delay in resolving the alleged unfair labor practices that led to Schumaker’s unemployment would injure Schumaker and perpetuate

⁵ This applies the rationale of a non-precedential ALJ decision in Town of Cicero, 30 PERI ¶ 56 (IL LRB-SP 2013).

his unemployment. First Transit/River Valley Metro, 26 PERI ¶ 38 (delay would cause injury where charging party was unemployed as a result of the alleged unfair labor practice). In turn, this injury to Schumaker also injures the Charging Party because Schumaker's absence from work deprives the Charging Party of an allegedly active member.⁶ Further, both AFSCME and the Board demonstrated that time was of the essence in processing the claim because AFSCME filed the charge within a week of Schumaker's initial discipline and the Board issued the complaint 28 days after Schumaker's termination.⁷ But see, Cook Cnty. State's Attorney v. Ill. State Labor Rel. Bd., 292 Ill. App. 3d 1, 7 (1st Dist. 1997) (no injury found where Board issued the complaint five months after the charge was filed and where the charging party waited two months after the alleged injury to file the with Board).

Second, compliance with the time limit for filing an answer is not unreasonable or unnecessarily burdensome under the circumstances of this case because the Respondent has not demonstrated mitigating circumstances which would justify its late answer. The Board must consider Respondent's excuses, explanations and mitigating circumstances in determining whether strict adherence to its filing rules is unreasonable or unnecessarily burdensome. Wood Dale Fire Protection Dist. v Ill. Labor Rel. Bd., 395 Ill. App. 3d 523, 532-533 (2nd Dist. 2009). Attorney negligence is not a sufficient ground to overturn a Board decision denying a variance. Wood Dale Fire Protection Dist., 395 Ill. App. at 530. However, "the negligence of counsel may be excused where mitigating circumstances are present." Cook Cnty. State's Attorney, 292 Ill. App. 3d at 12. Yet, the Board grants such variances only under exceptional circumstances. Vill. of Calumet Park, 17 PERI ¶ 2024 (IL LRB-SP 2001); aff'd by unpub. order, Docket No. 1-01-1520 (1st Dist. 2000); see also City of Kankakee, 17 PERI ¶ 2013 (IL LRB-SP 2001); City of Chicago Heights, 17 PERI ¶ 2026 (IL LRB-SP 2001) (due diligence standard used).

Here, Respondent's assertion, that it was unaware of the Board's rules, does not rise to the level of exceptional circumstances which warrant granting a variance. Indeed, the Board has upheld default judgments in the face of similar excuses. See, Vill. of Dolton, 17 PERI ¶ 2017 (IL LRB-SP 2001) (answer untimely due to docketing error arising from office personnel

⁶ This adopts the rationale from a non-precedential ALJ decision in which the ALJ held that injury or retaliation against a bargaining unit member constituted injury to the Charging Party-Union. Town of Cicero, 28 PERI ¶ 112 (IL LRB-SP ALJ 2012).

⁷ Although the Board issued the complaint three months after the Charging Party filed it, the Charging Party added additional allegations to reflect Schumaker's termination on November 1, 2013.

changes); City of Markham, 17 PERI ¶ 2036 (IL LRB-SP 2001) (attorney misread due date for answer and response to order to show cause); Ill. Secretary of State, 11 PERI ¶ 2027 (IL SLRB 1995) (failure to mail answer in a timely manner); Vill. of Maywood, 21 PERI ¶ 147 (IL LRB-SP ALJ 2005) (failure to file timely answer due to office turmoil).

Likewise, Respondent's argument that it had no opportunity to present a defense to the termination charge during investigation does not justify a late answer where the Respondent could have stated that it was without knowledge of that allegation's truth or falsity. See 80 Ill Admin Code 1220.40(b)(1).

Finally, this case is distinguishable from Cook County State's Attorney, in which the Court reversed the Board's denial of a variance. Unlike the respondent in Cook County State's Attorney, the Respondent here did not exercise diligence in filing the Answer or the request for relief because it sought such relief six days after the answer was due, not three hours after the deadline. Cook Cnty. State's Attorney, 292 Ill. App. 3d at 12 (variance warranted where employer set forth meritorious defense, timely notified Board of its defense in its position statement, and sought relief immediately upon discovering that answer had been filed three hours late); Ill. Secretary of State, 11 PERI ¶ 2027 (IL SLRB 1995) (upholding default judgment where answer was filed three days late).

Thus, given the Board's strict application of the time limit for filing an answer and the lack of mitigating circumstances, Respondent has waived its right to a hearing in this matter and has admitted the material factual and legal allegations as stated in the Complaint.⁸

II. Respondent's Admissions

By failing to file an answer, the Respondent has admitted the following material facts and legal allegations as stated in the Complaint.

1. At all times material, the Respondent has been a public employer within the meaning of Section 3(o) of the Act.

⁸ Even if the Board were to find that all three conditions were met under Section 1200.160, I would not, based upon the alleged facts, exercise such discretion to grant a variance and leave to file a late answer. The need to consistently apply long-standing rules outweighs any unreasonableness of application or unnecessary burden in this case. City of Ottawa, 27 PERI ¶ 6 FN8 (IL LRB-SP 2011).

2. At all times material, the Respondent has been subject to the jurisdiction of the State Panel of the Board, pursuant to Section 5(a-5) of the Act.
3. At all times material, Charging Party has been a labor organization within the meaning of Section 3(i) of the Act.
4. At all times material, Joel Schumaker and John Nickl are public employees within the meaning of Section 3(n) of the Act.
5. At all times material, Executive Director Garrett Peck and Superintendent of Parks Gene Coldwater were agents of the Respondent, authorized to act on its behalf.
6. On or about June 3, 2013, Charging Party began to organize a bargaining unit of Respondent's full-time and part-time non-professional employees.
7. Schumaker signed a union authorization card.
8. On or about June 21, 2013, Respondent convened a mandatory meeting with its employees asking how it could improve working conditions.
9. On or about June 29, 2013, Peck met with Park Maintenance employees informing them of his knowledge of the Union's efforts to obtain signed authorization cards.
10. On or about July 24, 2013, Charging Party filed a majority interest petition to represent Respondent's full-time and part-time non-professional employees.
11. On or about August 15, 2013, Peck and Coldwater interrogated Schumaker and Nickl concerning their involvement with the Union and the media.
12. On or about August 23, 2013, Peck disciplined Schumaker for allegedly soliciting an individual on or about August 21, 2013 to become a member of the Union.
13. On or about September 3, 2013, Schumaker was assigned duties different than the duties he had been assigned prior to the discipline.
14. On or about November 1, 2013, Schumaker was terminated from his position.
15. By its acts and conduct as described in paragraphs 11,12, 13 and 14, the Respondent has discriminated against a public employee in order to discourage membership in or support for the Charging Party, in violation of Section 10(a)(2) and (1) of the Act.

III. Conclusions of Law

Respondent violated Sections 10(a)(2) and (1) of the Act by interrogating Joel Schumaker and John Nickl concerning their involvement with the Union and the media,

disciplining Schumaker for allegedly soliciting an individual on or about August 21, 2013 to become a member of the Union, assigning Schumaker duties different than the duties he had been assigned prior to the discipline, and terminating Schumaker from his position.

IV. Recommended Order

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Respondent, Plainfield Park District, its officers and agents shall:

- 1) Cease and desist from:
 - a) Retaliating and discriminating against Joel Schumaker and John Nickl, or any of its other employees, for engaging in union or protected concerted activity.
 - b) In any like or related manner interfering with, restraining or coercing its employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed them in the Act.
- 2) Take the following affirmative action necessary to effectuate the policies of the Act:
 - a) Rescind the decision to discipline Schumaker for allegedly soliciting an individual to become a member of the Union.
 - b) Rescind the decision to assign Schumaker different duties than those he had been assigned prior to the discipline.
 - c) Remove all reference of Schumaker's discipline and termination from his personnel file.
 - d) Offer employee Schumaker immediate and full reinstatement to his former position without prejudice to his seniority or other rights and privileges, and make him whole in accordance with this decision, for any loss of earnings he may have suffered because of his termination, including back pay plus interest at a rate of seven percent per annum.
 - e) Preserve and upon request, make available to the Board or its agents all payroll and other records required to calculate the amount of back pay and the terms and conditions of reinstatement as set forth in this Decision.
 - f) Post, for 60 consecutive days, at all places where notices to employees are normally posted, signed copies of the attached notice. The Respondent shall take reasonable efforts to ensure that the notices are not altered, defaced or covered by any other material.
 - g) Notify the Board in writing, within 20 days of the date of this decision of the steps Respondent has taken to comply herewith.

V. Exceptions

Pursuant to Section 1200.135 of the Board's Rules, parties may file exceptions to the Administrative Law Judge's Recommended Decision and Order and briefs in support of those exceptions no later than 30 days after service of this Recommendation. Parties may file responses to exceptions and briefs in support of the responses no later than 15 days after service of the exceptions. In such responses, parties that have not previously filed exceptions may include cross-exceptions to any portion of the Administrative Law Judge's Recommendation. Within 7 days from the filing of cross-exceptions, parties may file cross-responses to the cross-exceptions. Exceptions, responses, cross-exceptions and cross-responses must be filed with the Board's General Counsel of the Illinois Labor Relations Board at 160 North LaSalle Street, Suite S-400, Chicago, Illinois 60601-3103, and served on all other parties. Exceptions, responses, cross-exceptions and cross-responses will not be accepted at the Board's Springfield office. The exceptions and/or cross-exceptions sent to the Board must contain a statement listing the other parties to the case and verifying that the exceptions and/or cross-exceptions have been provided to them. The exceptions and/or cross-exceptions will not be considered without this statement. If no exceptions have been filed within the 30-day period, the parties will be deemed to have waived their exceptions.

Issued at Chicago, Illinois this 9th day of January, 2014

**STATE OF ILLINOIS
ILLINOIS LABOR RELATIONS BOARD
STATE PANEL**

/s/ Anna Hamburg-Gal

**Anna Hamburg-Gal
Administrative Law Judge**

NOTICE TO EMPLOYEES

FROM THE ILLINOIS LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

Case No. S-CA-14-033

The Illinois Labor Relations Board, State Panel, has found that the the Plainfield Park District has violated the Illinois Public Labor Relations Act and has ordered us to post this Notice. We hereby notify you that the Illinois Public Labor Relations Act (Act) gives you, as an employee, these rights:

- To engage in self-organization
- To form, join or assist unions
- To bargain collectively through a representative of your own choosing
- To act together with other employees to bargain collectively or for other mutual aid and protection
- To refrain from these activities

Accordingly, we assure you that:

WE WILL cease and desist from retaliating and discriminating against Joel Schumaker and John Nickl, or any of our other employees, for engaging in union or protected concerted activity.

WE WILL cease and desist from in any like or related manner, interfering with, restraining or coercing our employees in the exercise of the rights guaranteed them in the Act.

WE WILL rescind the decision to discipline Schumaker for allegedly soliciting an individual to become a member of the Union.

WE WILL rescind the decision to assign Schumaker different duties than those he had been assigned prior to the discipline.

WE WILL offer employee Schumaker immediate and full reinstatement to his former position without prejudice to his seniority or other rights and privileges, and make him whole in accordance with this decision, for any loss

ILLINOIS LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

One Natural Resources Way, First Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62702

(217) 785-3155

160 North LaSalle Street, Suite S-400

Chicago, Illinois 60601-3103

(312) 793-6400

**THIS IS AN OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT NOTICE
AND MUST NOT BE DEFACED.**

NOTICE TO EMPLOYEES

FROM THE ILLINOIS LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

of earnings he may have suffered because of his termination, including back pay plus interest at a rate of seven percent per annum.

WE WILL remove all reference of Schumaker's discipline and termination from his personnel file.

DATE _____

Plainfield Park District,
(Employer)

ILLINOIS LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

One Natural Resources Way, First Floor

Springfield, Illinois 62702

(217) 785-3155

160 North LaSalle Street, Suite S-400

Chicago, Illinois 60601-3103

(312) 793-6400

**THIS IS AN OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT NOTICE
AND MUST NOT BE DEFACED.**
