

WSR 22-08-045

EMERGENCY RULES

EMPLOYMENT SECURITY DEPARTMENT

[Filed March 31, 2022, 10:58 a.m., effective April 4, 2022]

Effective Date of Rule: April 4, 2022.

Purpose: Pursuant to RCW 34.05.410 (1)(a), the department hereby adopts the use of brief adjudicative proceedings for use in certain appeals. This process is being adopted to reduce the wait time for appeals to be resolved in circumstances where a claimant appeals an unemployment insurance benefit decision, and no employer is an interested party.

Citation of Rules Affected by this Order: New WAC 192-04-145.

Statutory Authority for Adoption: RCW 34.05.410 (1)(a), 50.32.060, 50.32.080, 34.05.220, 50.12.040, 50.12.010.

Under RCW 34.05.350 the agency for good cause finds that immediate adoption, amendment, or repeal of a rule is necessary for the preservation of the public health, safety, or general welfare, and that observing the time requirements of notice and opportunity to comment upon adoption of a permanent rule would be contrary to the public interest.

Reasons for this Finding: Due to unprecedented unemployment insurance claims during the COVID-19 pandemic, the department and the office of administrative hearings (OAH) have a backlog of 40,947 pending appeals as of December 31, 2021. For comparison, there were 27,127 pending appeals at the end of 2020, and 2,470 at the end of 2019. This backlog has led to an average wait time of 167.3 days for appeals closed during December of 2021, compared to an average wait time of 31.58 days during December of 2019. The United States Department of Labor's performance metric calls for 60 percent of appeals to be resolved within 30 days and 80 percent of appeals to be resolved within 45 days. In December 2019, the department closed 71 percent of cases within 30 days and 94 percent of cases within 45 days. In December 2021, only two percent of appeals were resolved within 30 days and four percent of appeals within 45 days.

Currently, the department is referring between 400 and 500 cases per day (2,000 to 2,500 per week) to OAH. This trend is expected to continue through the end of the year with continued unemployment insurance claims processing associated federal pandemic programs, such as the mixed earner unemployment compensation program.

With the adoption of brief adjudicative proceedings, the department would eliminate between 30 to 60 minutes per case. Using a brief administrative proceeding, administrative law judges (ALJ) would have the ability to organize cases around other full hearings and organize and resolve cases at their own pace. The department estimates that each ALJ will be able to close up to 60 more appeals per week. With 10 ALJs assigned to brief adjudicative proceedings, the department anticipates it could address the backlog by closing an additional 130 to 260 appeals each week.

Number of Sections Adopted in Order to Comply with Federal Statute: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; Federal Rules or Standards: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; or Recently Enacted State Statutes: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted at the Request of a Nongovernmental Entity: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted on the Agency's own Initiative: New 1, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted in Order to Clarify, Streamline, or Reform Agency Procedures: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted using Negotiated Rule Making: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; Pilot Rule Making: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; or Other Alternative Rule Making: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Date Adopted: March 31, 2022.

Dan Zeitlin
Employment System Policy
and Integrity Director

OTS-3641.1

NEW SECTION

WAC 192-04-145 Brief adjudicative proceedings. (1) **Adoption of brief adjudicative proceedings.** Pursuant to RCW 34.05.410 (1)(a), the department hereby adopts the use of brief adjudicative proceedings for use in appeals.

(a) RCW 34.05.488 and 34.05.491 shall not apply to brief adjudicative proceedings under this rule.

(b) Brief adjudicative proceedings will only be used if:

(i) The appeal involves a claim for benefits;

(ii) The appeal is filed by a claimant;

(iii) No employer is an interested party pursuant to WAC 192-04-040; and

(iv) The presiding administrative law judge, in their sole discretion, determines a brief adjudicating proceeding is warranted.

(2) **Procedure for brief adjudicative proceedings.** The following procedural rules will apply to brief adjudicative proceedings:

(a) An administrative law judge with the office of administrative hearings will conduct the brief adjudicative proceeding.

(b) Not less than seven days before the date of the hearing, the office of administrative hearings shall serve notice on the claimant pursuant to WAC 10-08-040 that a brief adjudicative proceeding will occur. The notice of hearing will contain the following:

(i) Notice that the claimant may submit additional relevant documentary evidence and sworn oral statements, if desired, along with a date by which these submissions must be made and instructions for doing so;

(ii) Instructions for how the department or claimant may request that the brief adjudicative proceeding may be converted to a regular proceeding pursuant to subsection (4) of this section and the date by which such request must be submitted; and

(iii) The date of the brief adjudicative proceeding.

(c) The administrative law judge, in their sole discretion, may send a written request for additional evidence from the claimant or the department. The request will contain instructions for how to submit the additional evidence and the date by which additional evidence must be submitted.

(d) The administrative law judge's review will be limited to the record defined in subsection (3) of this section.

(e) If the claimant fails to provide any additional relevant documentary evidence or sworn oral statements, the administrative law judge will affirm the department's determination unless the evidence provided by the department is sufficient to resolve the matter in the claimant's favor.

(f) The administrative law judge shall issue a written decision consistent with WAC 192-04-150.

(3) **Record for brief adjudicative proceeding.** The record with respect to brief adjudicative proceedings will consist of the following:

(a) The department's determination letter;

(b) The claimant's appeal of the determination letter;

(c) All records relied upon by the department in support of its determination letter;

(d) Any additional records submitted by the department;

(e) Any additional records or sworn oral statements submitted by the claimant; and

(f) Any additional evidence submitted by the parties at the written request of the administrative law judge.

(4) **Conversion of brief adjudicative proceeding to regular proceeding.**

(a) A brief adjudicative proceeding will be converted to a regular proceeding if:

(i) The claimant files a conversion request by the deadline listed in the notice of the brief adjudicative proceeding. Such a request shall be automatically granted by the administrative law judge; or

(ii) The department files a conversion request by the deadline listed in the notice of the brief adjudicative proceeding. Such a request shall be automatically granted by the administrative law judge; or

(iii) The administrative law judge, at any time prior to issuing a written decision, determines the brief adjudicative proceeding shall be converted to a regular proceeding. Reasons the administrative law judge may convert the brief adjudicative proceeding to a regular proceeding may include, but are not limited to:

(A) The use of the brief adjudicative proceeding procedures violates any provision of law;

(B) The protection of the public interest requires that notice and an opportunity to be heard be given to persons other than the claimant and the department;

(C) A regular proceeding is required to adequately develop the record and decide the issues in the appeal; or

(D) The issues and interests involved otherwise warrant the use of the procedures in a regular proceeding.

(b) When a brief adjudicative proceeding is converted to a regular proceeding, the office of administrative hearings shall issue a new notice of hearing.

(5) **Right to petition for review.** A party aggrieved by a decision issued by an administrative law judge pursuant to a brief adjudicative proceeding shall have the same right to petition for review as contained in WAC 192-04-060. In conducting this review of the brief adjudicative proceeding, prior to rendering a decision, the commissioner shall order the taking of additional evidence by the office of administrative hearings to be made a part of the record in the case.

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