

discuss ex parte the merits of the appeal or review with any person who is connected with the appeal or review in an advocative or in an investigative capacity, or with any representative of such person. However, procedural matters shall not be included within this limitation; and furthermore, the ALJ or Judicial Officer may discuss the merits of the case with such a person if all parties to the appeal or review, or their attorneys have been given notice and an opportunity to participate. A memorandum of such discussion shall be included in the record.

(b) *Parties; interested persons.* No party or other interested person shall make or knowingly cause to be made to the ALJ or Judicial Officer an ex parte communication relevant to the merits of the appeal or review.

(c) *Procedure.* If the ALJ or Judicial Officer receives an ex parte communication in violation of this section, the one who receives the communication shall place in the public record of the appeal or review:

(1) All such written communications;

(2) Memoranda stating the substance of all such oral communications; and

(3) Copies of all written responses, and memoranda stating the substance of all oral responses thereto.

(4) Upon receipt of a communication knowingly made or knowingly caused to be made by a party in violation of this section, the ALJ or Judicial Officer may, to the extent consistent with the interests of justice and the policy of the underlying statute, require the party to show cause why its claim or interest in the appeal or review should not be dismissed, denied, disregarded or otherwise adversely affected on account of such violation.

(d) *Decision.* To the extent consistent with the interests of justice and the policy of the underlying statute, a violation of this section shall be sufficient grounds for a decision adverse to the party who knowingly commits a violation of this section or who knowingly causes such a violation to occur.

**§ 283.22 Form; filing; service; proof of service; computation of time; and extensions of time.**

(a) *Form.* (1) The original and two copies of all papers in a proceeding

conducted under this subpart shall be filed with the Hearing Clerk.

(2) Every pleading and paper filed in the proceeding shall contain a caption setting forth the title of the action, the docket number assigned by the Hearing Clerk, and a descriptive title (e.g., Motion for Extension of Time).

(3) Every pleading and paper shall be signed by and contain the address and telephone number of the representative for the party on whose behalf the paper was filed.

(b) *Filing.* Papers are considered filed when they are postmarked, or, received, if hand delivered. Date of mailing may be established by a certificate from the party or representative or by proof that the document was sent by certified or registered mail.

(c) *Service.* A party filing a document with the ALJ shall, at the time of filing, serve a copy of such document on every other party. Service upon any party of any document shall be made by delivering or mailing a copy to the party's last known address. When a party is represented by an attorney or designated representative, service shall be made upon such attorney or representative in lieu of the actual party.

(d) *Proof of service.* A certificate of the person serving the document by personal delivery or by mail, setting forth the date, time and manner of service, shall be proof of service.

(e) *Computation of time.* (1) In computing any period of time under this part or in an order issued thereunder, the time begins with the day following the act, event, or default, and includes the last day of the period, unless it is a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday observed by the Federal Government, in which event it includes the next business day.

(2) When a document has been served by mail, an additional five days will be added to the time permitted for any response.

(f) *Extensions of time.* Requests for extensions of time shall be submitted to the ALJ, Chief Judge or the Judicial Officer prior to the expiration of the original due date. The time for the filing of any document or paper required or authorized under the rules in this part may be extended by the ALJ, Chief Judge or the Judicial Officer, if,

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in the judgment of the ALJ, Chief Judge or the Judicial Officer, there is cause for the extension. In instances where the time permits notice of the request for extension, time shall be given to the other party to submit views concerning the request.

### § 283.23 Procedural matters.

(a) *Communications from Hearing Clerk.* In order to expedite the appeal process, the Hearing Clerk may develop form letters and transmittal forms to be used for notices, service of papers, requests for information, and all other communications between the Hearing Clerk's Office and the parties.

(b) *Representation.* All parties may be represented by attorneys or by designated representatives. Attorneys or designated representatives appearing for the parties shall file formal notices of appearances and withdrawals with the Hearing Clerk.

### Subpart C—Summary Procedure for Appeals of QC Claims of Less Than \$50,000

#### § 283.24 Incorporation of procedures by reference.

Except as otherwise provided, the following procedures detailed in subpart B of this part shall apply to appeals of QC claims of less than \$50,000: §§ 283.5 *Motion to Dismiss*; 283.6 *Answer*; 283.8 *Rebuttal or Amendment of Appeal or Answer*; 283.9 *Withdrawal of Appeal*; 283.10 *Consent Decision*; 283.18 *Motions and Requests*; 283.19 *ALJ's*; 283.20 *Review by the Judicial Officer*; 283.21 *Ex Parte Communications*; 283.22 *Filings; Service; Extensions of Time; and Computations of Time*; and 283.23 *Procedural Matters*.

#### § 283.25 Filing appeals for QC claims of less than \$50,000.

(a) *Time.* A State agency may appeal the bill for collection from FNS for a QC claim of less than \$50,000 for a food stamp QC error rate in excess of the tolerance level. A State agency must file a written notice of appeal, in accordance with this section, within 10 days of receipt of the bill for collection from FNS for a QC claim of less than \$50,000. The State agency may request an extension to the 10-day filing requirement in accordance with

§ 283.22(f). FNS shall issue the bill for collection by certified mail or personal service.

(b) *Exhaustion of administrative remedies.* The State agency must appeal the bill for collection to the ALJ, pursuant to this subpart, and exhaust the available administrative remedies before filing suit in the Federal District Courts.

(c) *Filing.* The notice of appeal shall be filed with the Hearing Clerk.

(d) *Content of the notice of appeal.* (1) A notice of appeal, in order to be considered acceptable must contain the following information:

(i) A brief and clear statement that it is an appeal from a QC claim of less than \$50,000 identifying the period the claim covers, the date and amount of the bill for collection, and the date of receipt of the bill for collection;

(ii) Identification of the State agency as the appellant and FNS as the appellee;

(iii) A statement that the notice of appeal is filed pursuant to section 14(a) of the Food Stamp Act;

(iv) A true copy of the bill for collection which constitutes the basis for the filing of the notice of appeal shall be attached to the notice.

(2) Failure to file an acceptable notice of appeal may result in a challenge by FNS to the notice and dismissal of the notice by the ALJ and a waiver of the opportunity for further appeal or review by the Judicial Officer unless the State agency pursues the options as discussed in §§ 283.17(d) and 283.20.

(e) *Receipt of notice of appeal and assignment of docket number.* Upon receipt of a notice of appeal, the Hearing Clerk shall assign the appeal a docket number. The Hearing Clerk shall:

(1) Send the State agency a letter which shall include the following information:

(i) Advise that the notice of appeal has been received and the date of receipt;

(ii) The docket number assigned to the appeal and instructions that all future communications related to the appeal shall reference the docket number, and;

(iii) That the State agency must file and serve its appeal petition, as set forth in § 283.22 not later than 60 days