

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION APPEALS BOARD
STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

OLGA JANET MOLINA, *Applicant*

vs.

**DESERT SHADES, INC.; SOUTHERN INSURANCE COMPANY
administered by AMTRUST, *Defendants***

**Adjudication Number: ADJ11065911
Long Beach District Office**

**OPINION AND DECISION
AFTER RECONSIDERATION**

We granted reconsideration in order to further study the factual and legal issues in this case. This is our Opinion and Decision After Reconsideration.

We have considered the allegations of defendant's Petition for Removal or in the alternative Reconsideration and the contents of the report of the workers' compensation administrative law judge (WCJ) with respect thereto. Based on our review of the record and based on the analysis of defendant's arguments in the WCJ's report, we will vacate our previous Opinion and Order Granting Petition for Reconsideration, dismiss defendant's Petition as one seeking reconsideration and deny it to the extent it seeks removal.

Section 5909 provides that a petition for reconsideration is deemed denied unless the Appeals Board acts on the petition within 60 days of filing. (Lab. Code, § 5909.) However, "it is a fundamental principle of due process that a party may not be deprived of a substantial right without notice...." (*Shiple v. Workers' Comp. Appeals Bd.* (1992) 7 Cal.App.4th 1104, 1108 [57 Cal.Comp.Cases 493].) In *Shiple*, the Appeals Board denied applicant's petition for reconsideration because the Appeals Board had not acted on the petition within the statutory time limits of Labor Code section 5909. The Appeals Board did not act on applicant's petition because it had misplaced the file, through no fault of the parties. The Court of Appeal reversed the Appeals Board's decision holding that the time to act on applicant's petition was tolled during the period that the file was misplaced. (*Id.* at p. 1108.)

Like the Court in *Shipley*, “we are not convinced that the burden of the system’s inadequacies should fall on [a party].” (*Shipley, supra*, 7 Cal.App.4th at p. 1108.) Defendant’s Petition was timely filed on November 1, 2020. Our failure to act was due to a procedural error and our time to act on defendant’s Petition was tolled.

A petition for reconsideration may properly be taken only from a “final” order, decision, or award. (Lab. Code, §§ 5900(a), 5902, 5903.) A “final” order has been defined as one that either “determines any substantive right or liability of those involved in the case” (*Rymer v. Hagler* (1989) 211 Cal.App.3d 1171, 1180; *Safeway Stores, Inc. v. Workers’ Comp. Appeals Bd. (Pointer)* (1980) 104 Cal.App.3d 528, 534-535 [45 Cal.Comp.Cases 410]; *Kaiser Foundation Hospitals v. Workers’ Comp. Appeals Bd. (Kramer)* (1978) 82 Cal.App.3d 39, 45 [43 Cal.Comp.Cases 661]) or determines a “threshold” issue that is fundamental to the claim for benefits. (*Maranian v. Workers’ Comp. Appeals Bd.* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 1068, 1070, 1075 [65 Cal.Comp.Cases 650].) Interlocutory procedural or evidentiary decisions, entered in the midst of the workers’ compensation proceedings, are not considered “final” orders. (*Id.* at p. 1075 [“interim orders, which do not decide a threshold issue, such as intermediate procedural or evidentiary decisions, are not ‘final’ ”]; *Rymer, supra*, at p. 1180 [“[t]he term [‘final’] does not include intermediate procedural orders or discovery orders”]; *Kramer, supra*, at p. 45 [“[t]he term [‘final’] does not include intermediate procedural orders”].) Such interlocutory decisions include, but are not limited to, pre-trial orders regarding evidence, discovery, trial setting, venue, or similar issues.

Here, the WCJ’s decision solely resolves an intermediate procedural or evidentiary issue or issues. The decision does not determine any substantive right or liability and does not determine a threshold issue. Accordingly, it is not a “final” decision and we will vacate our previous Opinion and Order Granting Petition for Reconsideration. Defendant’s Petition will be dismissed as one seeking reconsideration.

We will also deny the Petition to the extent it seeks removal. Removal is an extraordinary remedy rarely exercised by the Appeals Board. (*Cortez v. Workers’ Comp. Appeals Bd.* (2006) 136 Cal.App.4th 596, 599, fn. 5 [71 Cal.Comp.Cases 155]; *Kleemann v. Workers’ Comp. Appeals Bd.* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 274, 280, fn. 2 [70 Cal.Comp.Cases 133].) The Appeals Board will grant removal only if the petitioner shows that substantial prejudice or irreparable harm will result if removal is not granted. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 8, former § 10843(a), now § 10955(a) (eff. Jan. 1, 2020); see also *Cortez, supra*; *Kleemann, supra*.) Also, the petitioner must demonstrate that

reconsideration will not be an adequate remedy if a final decision adverse to the petitioner ultimately issues. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 8, former § 10843(a), now § 10955(a) (eff. Jan. 1, 2020).) Here, based on the analysis of defendant's arguments in the WCJ's report, we are not persuaded that substantial prejudice or irreparable harm will result if removal is denied and/or that reconsideration will not be an adequate remedy if the matter ultimately proceeds to a final decision adverse to defendant.

Therefore, we will vacate the previous Opinion and Order Granting Petition for Reconsideration, dismiss defendant's Petition as one seeking reconsideration and deny the Petition as one seeking removal.

For the foregoing reasons,

IT IS ORDERED as the Decision After Reconsideration of the Workers' Compensation Appeals Board that the Opinion and Order Granting Petition for Reconsideration issued by the Workers' Compensation Appeals Board on July 13, 2021 is **VACATED**.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that defendant's Petition for Reconsideration of the Findings and Order issued by the WCJ on October 15, 2020 is **DISMISSED**.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that defendant's Petition for Removal of the Findings and Order issued by the WCJ on October 15, 2020 is **DENIED**.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION APPEALS BOARD

/s/ MARGUERITE SWEENEY, COMMISSIONER

I CONCUR,

/s/ ANNE SCHMITZ, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

/s/ JOSÉ H. RAZO, COMMISSIONER



DATED AND FILED AT SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

September 9, 2021

SERVICE MADE ON THE ABOVE DATE ON THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW AT THEIR ADDRESSES SHOWN ON THE CURRENT OFFICIAL ADDRESS RECORD.

**HANNA BROPHY MACLEAN MCALEER & JENSEN
LAW OFFICES OF ALEXANDER SOLHI & ASSOCIATES
MUHAR GARBER
OLGA JANET MOLINA**

AI/pc

I certify that I affixed the official seal of the Workers' Compensation Appeals Board to this original decision on this date. *abs*