

WORKERS' COMPENSATION APPEALS BOARD
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

GILBERTO LOPEZ, *Applicant*

vs.

ROTATIONAL MOLDING INC.;
COMPWEST INSURANCE COMPANY, *Defendants*

Adjudication Numbers: ADJ14604728; ADJ16803607
Pomona District Office

OPINION AND ORDER
DISMISSING PETITION
FOR DISQUALIFICATION

Applicant seeks disqualification of the workers' compensation administrative law judge (WCJ) based upon the allegation that the WCJ issued prior Findings and Order in favor of defendant and then, upon applicant's filing of a petition for reconsideration, the WCJ rescinded the Findings and Order and reset the matter to consider applicant's objections.

We have not received an answer from defendant. The WCJ filed a Report and Recommendation on Petition for Disqualification (Report) recommending that we deny disqualification.

We have considered the allegations of the Petition for Disqualification and the contents of the WCJ's Report. Based on our review of the record, we will dismiss disqualification as the petition was not timely filed and is not supported by an affidavit or declaration under penalty of perjury. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 8, § 10960.) If we were not dismissing, we would otherwise have denied the petition based upon the WCJ's analysis of the merits contained in the WCJ's Report.

Labor Code¹ section 5311 provides that a party may seek to disqualify a WCJ upon any one or more of the grounds specified in Code of Civil Procedure section 641. (§ 5311; see also Code Civ. Proc., § 641.) Among the grounds for disqualification under section 641 are that the WCJ has "formed or expressed an unqualified opinion or belief as to the merits of the action"

¹ All future references are to the Labor Code unless noted.

(Code Civ. Proc., § 641(f)) or that the WCJ has demonstrated “[t]he existence of a state of mind ... evincing enmity against or bias toward either party.” (Code Civ. Proc., § 641(g)).

Under WCAB Rule 10960, proceedings to disqualify a WCJ “shall be initiated by the filing of a petition for disqualification **supported by an affidavit or declaration under penalty of perjury** *stating in detail facts* establishing one or more of the grounds for disqualification” (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 8, § 10960, italics added.) It has long been recognized that “[t]he allegations in a statement charging bias and prejudice of a judge must set forth specifically the facts on which the charge is predicated,” that “[a] statement containing nothing but conclusions and setting forth no facts constituting a ground for disqualification may be ignored,” and that “[w]here no facts are set forth in the statement there is no issue of fact to be determined.” (*Mackie v. Dyer* (1957) 154 Cal.App.2d 395, 399.)

Next, petitions for disqualification must be timely filed: “If the workers' compensation judge assigned to hear the matter and the grounds for disqualification are known, the petition for disqualification shall be filed **not more than 10 days** after service of notice of hearing or after grounds for disqualification are known.” (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 8, § 10960, (emphasis added).)

Furthermore, even if detailed and verified allegations of fact have been made, it is settled law that a WCJ is not subject to disqualification under section 641(f) if, prior to rendering a decision, the WCJ expresses an opinion regarding a legal or factual issue but the petitioner fails to show that this opinion is a fixed one that could not be changed upon the production of evidence and the presentation of arguments at or after further hearing. (*Taylor v. Industrial Acc. Com. (Thomas)* (1940) 38 Cal.App.2d 75, 79–80 [5 Cal.Comp.Cases 61].) Additionally, even if the WCJ expresses an unqualified opinion on the merits, the WCJ is not subject to disqualification under section 641(f) if that opinion is “based upon the evidence then before [the WCJ] and upon the [WCJ's] conception of the law as applied to such evidence.” (*Id.*; cf. *Kreling v. Superior Court* (1944) 25 Cal.2d 305, 312 [“It is [a judge's] duty to consider and pass upon the evidence produced before him, and when the evidence is in conflict, to resolve that conflict in favor of the party whose evidence outweighs that of the opposing party.”].)

Also, it is “well settled ... that the expressions of opinion uttered by a judge, in what he conceives to be a discharge of his official duties, are not evidence of bias or prejudice” under section 641(g) (*Kreling, supra*, 25 Cal.2d at pp. 310–311; accord: *Mackie, supra*, 154 Cal.App.2d at p. 400) and that “[e]rroneous rulings against a litigant, even when numerous and continuous,

form no ground for a charge of bias or prejudice, especially when they are subject to review.” (*McEwen v. Occidental Life Ins. Co.* (1916) 172 Cal. 6, 11; accord: *Mackie, supra*, 154 Cal.App.2d at p. 400 (emphasis added).) Similarly, “when the state of mind of the trial judge appears to be adverse to one of the parties but is based upon actual observance of the witnesses and the evidence given during the trial of an action, it does not amount to that prejudice against a litigant which disqualifies” the judge under section 641(g). (*Kreling, supra*, 25 Cal.2d at p. 312; see also *Moulton Niguel Water Dist. v. Colombo* (2003) 111 Cal.App.4th 1210, 1219 [“When making a ruling, a judge interprets the evidence, weighs credibility, and makes findings. In doing so, the judge necessarily makes and expresses determinations in favor of and against parties. How could it be otherwise? We will not hold that every statement a judge makes to explain his or her reasons for ruling against a party constitutes evidence of judicial bias.”].)

Under no circumstances may a party’s unilateral and subjective perception of bias afford a basis for disqualification. (*Haas v. County of San Bernardino* (2002) 27 Cal.4th 1017, 1034; *Robbins v. Sharp Healthcare* (2006) 71 Cal.Comp.Cases 1291, 1310–1311 (Significant Panel Decision).)

The conduct of the WCJ in this matter demonstrates a lack of bias. Upon receipt of applicant’s petition for reconsideration, the WCJ rescinded the Findings and Order and commenced further proceedings to fully consider the positions raised by applicant.

Here, the petition was not timely filed and did not contain an affidavit under penalty of perjury stating in detail the known facts warranting disqualification. Accordingly, we dismiss the petition for disqualification.

For the foregoing reasons,

IT IS ORDERED that applicant's Petition for Disqualification of the WCJ filed on October 31, 2025, is **DISMISSED**.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION APPEALS BOARD

/s/ CRAIG L. SNELLINGS, COMMISSIONER

I CONCUR,

/s/ JOSÉ H. RAZO, COMMISSIONER

/s/ KATHERINE A. ZALEWSKI, CHAIR



DATED AND FILED AT SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

DECEMBER 22, 2025

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

**GILBERTO LOPEZ
WATCHEL LAW
SAPRA & NAVARRA LLP**

EDL/mt

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