

ALBERTA INSURANCE COUNCIL
(the "AIC")

In the Matter of the *Insurance Act*, R.S.A. 2000 Chapter I-3
(the "Act")

And

In the Matter of Jason Michael Benedet
(the "Agent")

DECISION
OF
The Life Insurance Council
(the "Council")

This case involved an allegation pursuant to s. 481(2) of the Act. Specifically, it is alleged that the Agent failed or refused to provide information and documentation requested by the AIC through a Demand for Information (the "Demand"). In so doing, it is alleged that the Agent contravened a provision of the Act as contemplated in s. 480(1)(b).

Facts and Evidence

This matter proceeded by way of a written Report to Council dated February 12, 2018 (the "Report"). The Report was forwarded to the Agent for review and to allow the Agent to provide the Council with any further evidence or submissions by way of Addendum. The Agent did not respond.

In November, 2017 the AIC conducted audits to verify that the Continuing Education ("CE") credits disclosed on licensees' renewal applications were correct. The AIC randomly selected agents for audit who were pulled from a pool of agents who renewed their certificates of authority during the last days of the annual renewal period and these agents were asked to provide proof of CE credits for the past 3 licensing periods.

The Agent was the holder of life and accident & sickness ("A&S") certificates of authority and was licensed from March 29, 2005 to February 15, 2007. The Agent then reinstated his certificates of authority on November 25, 2016 and he held them until December 18, 2017 when they were suspended due to his failure to provide proof of CE credits.

On November 14, 2017 the AIC emailed the Demand to the Agent and provided him with thirty days to respond. The AIC telephoned the Agent on November 29, 2017 and requested that he respond to the CE audit within the 30 day period set out in the Demand. The Agent did not respond.

Discussion

As we have noted previously, the AIC operates under a delegation from the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance that authorizes the AIC to investigate complaints against holders and former holders of insurance agent certificates of authority. Pursuant to the Minister of Finance Directive No. 05/01, the Minister also delegated his powers under s. 481 to the AIC. Section 481 states that “[t]he Minister may direct the holder or former holder of a certificate of authority to provide to the Minister within a reasonable period of time specified in the direction any information specified by the Minister relating to the matters in s. 480(1).” Subsection 2 states that the “... A person served with a direction ... who has the information must provide the information in accordance with the direction.”

The offence of failing to respond to a demand for information is one of strict liability. This means that in order to be found guilty, the AIC only needs to prove that the Demand was properly made and delivered. There is no requirement that the AIC prove that the Agent’s failure to respond was intentional. Once the AIC proves that the Demand was made, the onus shifts to the Agent to demonstrate that he took all reasonable efforts to avoid committing the offence. From the evidence in the Report, we are satisfied that the AIC’s Demand meets the requirements of s. 481 of the Act. The investigation arose out of matters found in s. 480 of the Act and he was given a reasonable opportunity to respond. Given the fact that the Agent failed to respond to the Report, he has not met the burden of establishing the due diligence defence and we find him guilty as alleged in the Report.

In terms of the applicable sanction, the Act requires that holders and former holders of licenses provide information when called upon to do so. The number of agents failing to respond to audit demands is unacceptably high. Given this, we are of the view that a significant civil penalty is warranted so as to send a message to Alberta’s insurance agents that responding to a demand is a basic requirement of participating in the insurance industry. This is especially the case where, as here, the Agent failed to produce any response to the investigator’s communications. Therefore, we order that a civil penalty in the amount of \$750.00 be levied against the Agent pursuant to s. 13(1)(b) of the *Certificate Expiry, Penalties and Fees Regulation*, A.R. 125/2001. The civil penalty must be paid within thirty (30) days of receiving this notice.

In the event that the civil penalty is not paid within thirty (30) days, interest will begin to accrue at the applicable prescribed rate. Pursuant to s. 482 of the Act (copy enclosed), the Agent has thirty (30) days in which to appeal this decision by filing a notice of appeal with the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance.

This Decision was made by way of a motion made and carried at a properly conducted meeting of the Life Insurance Council. The motion was duly recorded in the minutes of that meeting.

Dated: April 16, 2018

Original signed by
Kenneth Doll, Chair
Life Insurance Council

Extract from the *Insurance Act*, Chapter I-3**Appeal**

482 A decision of the Minister under this Part to refuse to issue, renew or reinstate a certificate of authority, to impose terms and conditions on a certificate of authority, to revoke or suspend a certificate of authority or to impose a penalty on the holder or former holder of a certificate of authority may be appealed in accordance with the regulations.

Extract from the *Insurance Councils Regulation*, Alberta Regulation 126/2001**Notice of appeal**

16(1) A person who is adversely affected by a decision of a council may appeal the decision by submitting a notice of appeal to the Superintendent within 30 days after the council has mailed the written notice of the decision to the person.

(2) The notice of appeal must contain the following:

- a) a copy of the written notice of the decision being appealed;
- b) a description of the relief requested by the appellant;
- c) the signature of the appellant or the appellant's lawyer;
- d) an address for service in Alberta for the appellant;
- e) an appeal fee of \$200 payable to the Provincial Treasurer.

(3) The Superintendent must notify the Minister and provide a copy of the notice of appeal to the council whose decision is being appealed when a notice of appeal has been submitted.

(4) If the appeal involves a suspension or revocation of a certificate of authority or a levy of a penalty, the council's decision is suspended until after the disposition of the appeal by a panel of the Appeal Board.

Address for Superintendent of Insurance:

Superintendent of Insurance
Alberta Finance
402 Terrace Building
9515-107 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2C3