

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING OFFICER

September 30, 2022

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)	
Complainant,)	
)	
v.)	8 U.S.C. § 1324a Proceeding
)	OCAHO Case No. 2022A00049
)	
STEIDLE LAWN & LANDSCAPE, LLC,)	
Respondent.)	
_____)	

Appearances: Matthew Brunkhorst, Esq., for Complainant
Eric J. Wulff, Esq., for Respondent

ORDER

This case arises under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a. Complainant, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), filed a complaint with the Office of the Chief Administrative Hearing Officer on June 8, 2022 alleging that Respondent, Steidle Lawn & Landscape, LLC, failed to present Forms I-9 for thirty-three individuals, in violation of 8 U.S.C. § 1324a(a)(1)(B).

The Court sent Respondent a Notice of Case Assignment for Complaint Alleging Unlawful Employment (NOCA), a copy of the complaint, the Notice of Intent to Fine, and Respondent’s request for a hearing on June 14, 2022, via U.S. certified mail. The NOCA directed that an answer was to be filed within thirty (30) days of receipt of the complaint, that failure to answer could lead to default, and that proceedings would be governed by Department of Justice regulations.¹

Although the U.S. Postal Service indicated service of the NOCA on Respondent on June 21, 2022, making an answer due no later than July 21, 2022, *see* 28 C.F.R. §§ 68.3(a), 68.9(a), Respondent did not file an answer by that date. On August 25, 2022, the Court issued an Order to Show Cause, directing Respondent to file an answer comporting with the requirements of 28 C.F.R. § 68.9(c), and explain why it failed to timely file an answer, within twenty-one (21) days of the date of the Order to Show Cause.

¹ OCAHO Rules of Practice and Procedure, 28 C.F.R. pt. 68 (2022).

On September 15, 2022, Respondent sent the Court an answer comporting with the requirements of 28 C.F.R. § 68.9(c) by fax and by first-class mail, but did not include an explanation for why it failed to timely file the answer.

As the Court noted in its Order to Show Cause, OCAHO Rules state that “[f]ailure of the respondent to file an answer within the time provided may be deemed to constitute a waiver of his or her right to appear and contest the allegations of the complaint” and “[t]he Administrative Law Judge may enter a judgment by default.” 28 C.F.R. § 68.9(b); *see also* *Nickman v. Mesa Air Grp.*, 9 OCAHO no. 1106, 1 (2004) (holding that if default judgment is entered, judgment may be entered for the complainant without a hearing). The default must be excused before the party is permitted to answer. *United States v. Quickstuff, LLC*, 11 OCAHO no. 1265, 4 (2015).

A showing of good cause is a condition precedent to permitting a late answer, and where that showing is not made, a late answer may not be accepted. *United States v. Medina*, 3 OCAHO no. 485, 882, 889 (1993); *see United States v. Shine Auto Serv.*, 1 OCAHO no. 70, 444, 445–46 (1989) (Vacation by the CAHO of the ALJ’s Order Denying Default Judgment) (finding it was error for the ALJ to deny the complainant’s default judgment motion and permit a late file answered, when the respondent did not timely respond to that motion and proffered no good cause for its failure to timely file an answer); *see also United States v. Kirk*, 1 OCAHO no. 72, 455, 456–57 (1989) (granting default judgment when response to show cause order did not establish good cause for failure to answer).

As Respondent has made no proffer of good cause for its failure to timely file an answer, the Court may enter a default judgment against it pursuant to 28 C.F.R. § 68.9(b). However, given the preference for resolving cases on their merits, *see United States v. MRD Landscaping & Maint., Corp.*, 15 OCAHO 1407C, 3 (2022), the Court will provide Respondent a final opportunity to provide an explanation for its failure to timely file its answer. Upon receipt of the response, the Court will determine if Respondent has demonstrated the requisite good cause for failing to file its answer to the complaint and will decide whether to allow its untimely answer.

The Court therefore ORDERS that Respondent file a response with the Court by October 14, 2022, in which it must provide facts sufficient to show good cause for its failure to timely file an answer to the complaint in this case.

SO ORDERED.

Dated and entered on September 30, 2022.

Honorable Jean C. King
Chief Administrative Law Judge