

**BEFORE THE ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL APPEALS BOARD
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

AB-8439

File: 20-355886 Reg: 04058564

7-ELEVEN, INC., PRADEEP TYAGI, and SHAMA TYAGI dba 7-Eleven #2121-21790
3436 Adams Avenue, San Diego, CA 92116,
Appellants/Licensees

v.

DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL,
Respondent

Administrative Law Judge at the Dept. Hearing: John P. McCarthy

Appeals Board Hearing: February 2, 2006
Los Angeles, CA

ISSUED MAY 17, 2006

7-Eleven, Inc., Pradeep Tyagi, and Shama Tyagi, doing business as 7-Eleven #2121-21790 (appellants), appeal from a decision of the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control¹ which suspended their license for 15 days for their clerk, Antonio Garcia-Ambriz, having sold a 24-ounce can of Coors Light beer to Melissa Darwent, a 17-year-old police minor decoy, a violation of Business and Professions Code section 25658, subdivision (a).

Appearances on appeal include appellants 7-Eleven, Inc., Pradeep Tyagi, and Shama Tyagi, appearing through their counsel, Ralph B. Saltsman, Stephen W. Solomon, and R. Bruce Evans, and the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, appearing through its counsel, David B. Wainstein.

¹The decision of the Department, dated April 25, 2005, is set forth in the appendix.

FACTS AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Appellants' off-sale beer and wine license was issued on September 13, 1999. The Department instituted an accusation against appellants on December 23, 2004, charging the sale of an alcoholic beverage to a minor on October 9, 2004. An administrative hearing was held on April 5, 2005. Subsequent to the hearing, the Department issued its decision which determined that the charge of the accusation had been established and appellants failed to establish an affirmative defense under Department Rule 141.

Appellants thereafter filed a timely appeal in which they contend they were denied due process as a result of the Department's ex parte communication to its decision maker.² Appellants request, in the alternative, that the decision be reversed as to penalty, but offer no reason why the Board should do so. The penalty - a 16-day suspension - appears to be well within the Department's discretion.

DISCUSSION

Appellants assert the Department violated their right to procedural due process when the attorney representing the Department at the hearing before the administrative law judge (ALJ) provided a document called a Report of Hearing (the report) to the Department's decision maker (or the decision maker's advisor) after the hearing, but before the Department issued its decision. Appellants also filed a Motion to Augment Record (the motion), requesting that the report provided to the Department's decision

² Appellants have filed a supplemental brief raising for the first time the contention that their motion to compel discovery was improperly denied. The brief was filed after the Department had filed its reply to appellants' opening brief, thus not affording the Department sufficient time to respond prior to the hearing. For that reason, we consider the brief untimely, and decline to consider the issue.

maker be made part of the record. The Appeals Board discussed these issues at some length, and reversed the Department's decisions in three appeals in which the appellants filed motions and alleged due process violations virtually identical to the motions and issues raised in the present case: *Quintanar* (AB-8099), *KV Mart* (AB-8121), and *Kim* (AB-8148), all issued in August 2004 (referred to in this decision collectively as "*Quintanar*" or "the *Quintanar* cases").³

The Board held that the Department violated due process by not separating and screening the prosecuting attorneys from any Department attorney, such as the chief counsel, who acted as the decision maker or advisor to the decision maker. A specific instance of the due process violation occurs when the Department's prosecuting attorney acts as an advisor to the Department's decision maker by providing the report before the Department's decision is made.

The Board's decision that a due process violation occurred was based primarily on appellate court decisions in *Howitt v. Superior Court* (1992) 3 Cal.App.4th 1575 [5 Cal.Rptr.2d 196] (*Howitt*) and *Nightlife Partners, Ltd. v. City of Beverly Hills* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 81 [133 Cal.Rptr.2d 234], which held that overlapping, or "conflating," the roles of advocate and decision maker violates due process by depriving a litigant of his or her right to an objective and unbiased decision maker, or at the very least, creating

³ The Department filed petitions for review with the Second District Court of Appeal in each of these cases. The cases were consolidated and the court affirmed the Board's decisions. In response to the Department's petition for rehearing, the court modified its opinion and denied rehearing. The cases are now pending in the California Supreme Court and, pursuant to Rule of Court 976, are not citable. (*Dept. of Alcoholic Beverage Control v. Alcoholic Beverage Control Appeals Bd.* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 615, review granted July 13, 2005, S133331.)

"the substantial risk that the advice given to the decision maker, 'perhaps unconsciously' . . . will be skewed." (*Howitt, supra*, at p. 1585.)

Although the legal issue in the present appeal is the same as that in the *Quintanar* cases, there is a factual difference that we believe requires a different result. In each of the three cases involved in *Quintanar*, the ALJ had submitted a proposed decision to the Department that dismissed the accusation. In each case, the Department rejected the ALJ's proposed decision and issued its own decision with new findings and determinations, imposing suspensions in all three cases. In the present appeal, however, the Department adopted the proposed decision of the ALJ in its entirety, without additions or changes.

Where, as here, there has been no change in the proposed decision of the ALJ, we cannot say, without more, that there has been a violation of due process. Any communication between the advocate and the advisor or the decision maker after the hearing did not affect the due process accorded appellants at the hearing. Appellants have not alleged that the proposed decision of the ALJ, which the Department adopted as its own, was affected by any post-hearing occurrence. If the ALJ was an impartial adjudicator (and appellants have not argued to the contrary), and it was the ALJ's decision alone that determined whether the accusation would be sustained and what discipline, if any, should be imposed upon appellants, it appears to us that appellants received the process that was due them in this administrative proceeding. Under these circumstances, and with the potential of an inordinate number of cases in which this due process argument could possibly be asserted, this Board cannot expand the holding in *Quintanar* beyond its own factual situation.

Under the circumstances of this case and our disposition of the due process issue raised, appellants are not entitled to augmentation of the record. With no change in the ALJ's proposed decision upon its adoption by the Department, we see no relevant purpose that would be served by the production of any post-hearing document. Appellants' motion is denied.

ORDER

The decision of the Department is affirmed.⁴

FRED ARMENDARIZ, CHAIRMAN
SOPHIE C. WONG, MEMBER
TINA FRANK, MEMBER
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL
APPEALS BOARD

⁴ This final decision is filed in accordance with Business and Professions Code §23088 and shall become effective 30 days following the date of the filing of this final decision as provided by §23090.7 of said code.

Any party may, before this final decision becomes effective, apply to the appropriate district court of appeal, or the California Supreme Court, for a writ of review of this final decision in accordance with Business and Professions Code §23090 et seq.