

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

AB-7533a

File: 20-344296 Reg: 99046833

EQUILON ENTERPRISES, LLC dba Texaco Station
3090 Main Street, Irvine, CA 92614,
Appellant/Licensee

v.

DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL,
Respondent

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

Appeals Board Hearing: May 9, 2002
Los Angeles, CA

ISSUED SEPTEMBER 11, 2002

Equilon Enterprises, LLC, doing business as Texaco Station (appellant), appeals from a decision of the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control¹ which suspended its license for 15 days for its clerk having sold an alcoholic beverage to a minor decoy, being contrary to the universal and generic public welfare and morals provisions of the California Constitution, article XX, §22, arising from a violation of Business and Professions Code §25658, subdivision (a).

Appearances on appeal include appellant Equilon Enterprises, LLC, appearing through its counsel, Ralph Barat Saltsman and Stephen Warren Solomon, and the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, appearing through its counsel, Jonathon E. Logan.

¹The decision of the Department, dated September 27, 2001, is set forth in the appendix.

FACTS AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

This is the second appeal in this matter.

In the original appeal, the Appeals Board affirmed the findings of the Department that an alcoholic beverage had been sold to a minor, acting as a police decoy, but ordered the matter remanded to the Department to permit the appellant discovery of the identities of other licensees who may have made sales to the decoy in question on the same day as the sale by appellant's clerk.²

In its Amended Decision Following Appeals Board Decision, the Department remanded the matter to Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) John P. McCarthy for compliance with the discovery request as directed by the Board, and to "take further evidence and argument, by way of affidavit and briefing only, as to what new evidence [appellant intends] to offer at any further hearing on this matter and how such evidence is relevant to the proceeding." Thereafter, the ALJ was to "hold any further proceedings as he determines are necessary and appropriate, in his exclusive discretion."

The ALJ directed the Department to provide to appellant the discovery ordered by the Appeals Board. The Department identified one other licensee which sold an alcoholic beverage to the same decoy on the same night that appellant's clerk did.

Appellant filed an offer of proof requesting further proceedings and the Department filed a reply. The ALJ's decision, adopted by the Department, found appellant's offer of proof inadequate because it was too general and failed to "establish the actual existence of any new and relevant evidence to support its request for further

² In The Circle K Corporation (2000) AB-7031a, the Board ruled that a licensee charged with having sold an alcoholic beverage to a minor decoy was entitled to discovery of the names and addresses of other licensees, if any, who sold to the same decoy in the course of the same decoy operation.

proceedings." The license was again ordered suspended for 15 days.

Appellant filed a timely appeal from the Department's decision in which it argues that the Department violated the Order of the Appeals Board by first requiring, and then rejecting, appellant's offer of proof and, in doing so, denied appellant its right to cross examination.

DISCUSSION

This is one of a number of similar appeals arising from decoy operations where, after the Appeals Board had ordered the disclosure of the identities of other licensees charged with selling to that same decoy, the Department reaffirmed its original order after finding that the licensee's offer of proof did not warrant further proceedings.

In several of the subsequent appeals, it appeared from the record that the licensee in question had already, through its counsel, possessed the identities of the other licensees to whom sales were made. Therefore, the Board did not address the question of the adequacy of the offer of proof. Instead, it concluded that the licensees in those cases had not suffered any prejudice from not having obtained the discovery permitted by the Board until after the administrative hearing.

In this case, there is nothing in the record that would indicate that appellant possessed such information, either directly or through its counsel. Consequently, we must address the issue posed by appellant, i.e., that the Department abused its discretion by ordering appellant to file an offer of proof, and after appellant had done so, finding the offer insufficient to justify further proceedings.

It is appellant's position that its ability to cross-examine the decoy and the police officer accompanying the decoy was impaired by the lack of such information. We can understand how it may have been. We know from the many appeals we heard arising

from decoy operations that it is often the case that the decoy will visit a large number of premises in the course of an operation. Appellants contend that, at times, the decoy will confuse events which occurred in one location with what took place at another, and that cross-examination is the only way to ferret out such possible confusion.

It seems to us that requiring an appellant to identify specific elements of proof, as the Department required, places too great a burden on appellant. Cross-examination seeks testimony which will reduce the persuasive value of the witness's direct testimony, and does not readily lend itself to preliminary delineation to the extent the Department has required.

When the Board concluded that licensees were entitled to discover the identities of other sellers to the decoy in question, it was because it was persuaded that those licensees had not been given an opportunity to conduct a full and complete cross-examination of the Department's witnesses. We are still of that view. Consequently, we believe the only way that full effect can be given to our earlier ruling on discovery is to order this case remanded to the Department to permit appellant the opportunity to cross-examine the witnesses against it armed with the information obtained through discovery.

We are not unaware of the possible difficulties the Department may encounter in presenting its witnesses for further cross-examination, or even its inability to do so, as a result of the passage of time while these appeals were pending. However, had the Department not been so adamant in its refusal to provide discovery until required to do so by this Board, and only then after futile attempts to overturn the Board's discovery decisions, this case might have been concluded long ago.

ORDER

The decision of the Department is reversed and the case is remanded to the Department for such further proceedings as may be necessary in light of our comments herein.³

TED HUNT, CHAIRMAN
E. LYNN BROWN, MEMBER
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL
APPEALS BOARD

³ 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.