

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
IN THE COURT OF APPEALS

APPEAL FROM THE SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, LICENSING AND REGULATION
SOUTH CAROLINA CONTRACTORS LICENSING BOARD

Honorable Ralph King Anderson, III
Chief Administrative Law Judge

APPELLATE CASE NUMBER: 2017-001311

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SC Court of Appeals

N. Bobby Knight & Construction Group, LLC,.....Appellants

v.

South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation,
South Carolina Contractor's Licensing Board.....Respondent

APPELLANT'S FINAL BRIEF

WILLIAM K. SWOPE, ESQUIRE
SWOPE LAW FIRM, P.A.
1525 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.
Suite 208
Charleston, SC 29407
(843)852-4925
Attorney for Appellant



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1525 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.
Suite 208
Charleston, SC 29407
(843)852-4925
Attorney for Appellant

T. KYLE TENNIS
ASSISTANT DISCIPLINARY COUNSEL
S.C. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,
LICENSING AND REGULATION
P.O. Box 11329
Columbia, SC 29211-1329
(803)896-4321
Attorney for Respondent

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ISSUES ON APPEAL

1. Did the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, South Carolina Contractor's Licensing Board provide proper notice of the formal summons and complaint to Construction Group, LLC in compliance with SCRCF Rules 4 (d)(1), (3), (8), (g) and 5(d)?
2. Does the lack of proof of notice to Construction Group, Inc. deprive the Administrative Law Court of subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to SCRCF Rule 12(b)(1)?

STATEMENT OF FACTS

This matter came before the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, South Carolina Contractor's Licensing Board, (hereinafter "Contractor's Board") on a formal complaint against Construction Group, LLC and N. Bobby Knight. (R. p. 2). A single notice of the formal complaint was allegedly mailed by personnel of the Contractor's Board to 3940 Hottinger Avenue, North Charleston, South Carolina 29405 by certified mail - return receipt requested and to 108 Wilson Street, Summerville, South Carolina 29483. (R. Supp., p. 9). However, the Contractor's Board failed to provide proof of a receipt of the service, as no return receipt was obtained. (R. pp. 70-1). Thereafter, a notice of a hearing before the hearing officer and a Final Order Hearing were allegedly served in the same manner. (R. Supp., p. 9). Order of Dismissal dated and filed May 4, 2017. (R. pp. 116-23).

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

This matter came before the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, South Carolina Contractor's Licensing Board, (hereinafter "Contractor's Board"), on a formal complaint against Construction Group, LLC and N. Bobby Knight. (R. p. 2). A single notice of the formal complaint was allegedly mailed by personnel of the Contractor's Board to 3940 Hottinger Avenue, North Charleston, South Carolina 29405 by certified mail - return receipt requested and to 108 Wilson Street, Summerville, South Carolina 29483 in compliance with SCRCF Rule 4(d)(3).

(R. Supp., p. 9). However, the Contractor's Board failed to provide proof of a receipt of the service, as no return receipt was obtained, in compliance with SCRCR Rule 4(g). (R. pp. 70-1). Subsequent hearing notices were allegedly served in the same manner. R. p. 8 and 102 and R. Supp. pp. 2-3). The South Carolina Administrative Law Court dismissed the Appellants answer on the grounds that Construction Group, LLC could only be represented by counsel. (R. p. 116).

This matter comes now before this Honorable Court.

DISCUSSION

1. COMPLIANCE WITH SCRCR RULES 4(d)(1), (3), (8), (g) and 5(d)

Procedural due process is guaranteed under the 14th and 5th Amendments to the United States Constitution, and is applicable to the States, thereunder, as well.

In the absence of service of process (or waiver of service by the defendant), a court ordinarily may not exercise power over a party the complaint names as defendant. *See Omni Capital Int'l, Ltd. V. Rudolf Wolff & Co.*, 484 U.S. 97, 104 (1987). ("Before a...court may exercise personal jurisdiction over a defendant, the procedural requirement of service of summons must be satisfied.") *Mississippi Publishing Corp. V. Murphree*, 326 U.S. 438, 444-5 (1946).

This very court opined in *Roche v. Young Brothers, Inc. of Florence*, 313 S.C. 356, 437 S.E.2d 560 (Ct. App. 1993):

The rules of civil procedure with respect to service of process are mandatory and the strictest and most exacting compliance with them is required when service is by mail. A failure to comply with them renders any attempted service void. *Timmons v. United States*, 194 F.2d 357 (4th Cir.), cert. Denied 344 U.S. 844, 73 S. Ct. 59, 97 L.Ed. 656 (1952); *See also Dandy v. American Laundry Machinery, Inc.*, 301 S.C. 24, 389 S.E.2d 866 (1990); *Able v. Schweitzer*, [313 S.C. 359], 300 S.C. 321, 387 S.E.2d 697 (Ct. App. 1989) (rule relating to commencement of action and service of process strictly construed).

Here, the failure to provide the actual notice to both Defendants, Construction Group, LLC and N. Bobby Knight, individually, is a fatal "due process" error. Either the single notice was an attempt to comply with SCRCR Rule 4(d)(1) on N. Bobby Knight, individually, or SCRCR Rule 4(d)(3) on

Construction Group, LLC. It cannot accomplish both.

Further, the effort at service by "certified mail-return receipt requested" pursuant to SCRCF Rule 4(d)(8) of another single notice on both Defendants was defective in that the Contractor's Board failed to provide the proof of service required by SCRCF Rule 4 (g). Service of a summons and complaint upon...defendant...may be made...by...certified mail, return receipt requested and delivery restricted to the addressee....Service pursuant to this paragraph shall not be the basis for the entry of default unless the record contains a return receipt showing the acceptance by the defendant. (emphasis added). **Graham Law Firm, P.A. v. Makawi**, 396 S.C. 290, 292, 721 S.E.2d 430, 432-3 (2012).

Further, SCRCF Rule 5(d) requires that proof of service of a summons and complaint shall be filed with the Clerk within ten (10) days of service. No proof was even filed as of the motion to dismiss hearing in the Administrative Law Court.

Thus, this Honorable Court is compelled to remand this matter to the Contractor's Board for a new trial "de novo" after proper notice to the Appellants/Defendants.

2. **COMPLIANCE WITH SCRCF RULE 12(b)(1)**

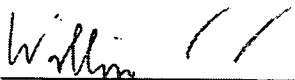
The issue of subject matter jurisdiction may be raised at any time, including for the first time on appeal. Here, as the underlying service of process issues deprived at least one of the Appellants of procedural "due process" and proper notice, the tribunals lacked subject matter, as well as personal jurisdiction over one or both parties. The proper remedy for which is remand for a new trial "de novo" before the Contractor's Board after proper notice to both Appellants/Defendants.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the foregoing, this Honorable Court is compelled to reverse the Order of Dismissal of the Administrative Law Court, and to remand the matter to the Contractor's Board for a new trial "de novo" after proper notice to the Appellants/Defendants.

Respectfully submitted,

SWOPE LAW FIRM, P.A.



WILLIAM K. SWOPE, ESQUIRE

SC Bar#: 15168

1525 Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Suite 208

Charleston, South Carolina 29407

Ph.: (843) 852-4925

Fax: (843) 576-4654

Email: swopelawfirm@comcast.net

Attorney for Appellants

Charleston, South Carolina

May 25, 2018

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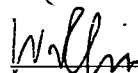
South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation,
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APPELLANT'S COUNSEL'S CERTIFICATION AS TO THE APPELLANT'S BRIEF AND
REPLY BRIEF ARE IN COMPLIANCE WITH SCACR 211

I certify that the Appellant's Brief and Reply Brief are in compliance with SCACR 211 and mailed
to the Honorable South Carolina Court of Appeals in this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

SWOPE LAW FIRM, P.A.



WILLIAM K. SWOPE, ESQUIRE

S.C. Bar No.: 15168

1525 Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Ste. 208

Charleston, SC 29407

Ph.: (843)852-4925

Attorney for Appellants

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