

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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**JUDINETTA P ROBINSON**  
Claimant

**APPEAL 18A-UI-10473-DG-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**COUNTY OF SCOTT**  
Employer

**OC: 09/23/18  
Claimant: Respondent (2)**

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Iowa Code § 96.4(3) – Ability to and Availability for Work  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(1) - Able to Work - illness, injury or pregnancy

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Employer filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated October 16, 2018, (reference 01) that held claimant able to and available for work. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on November 2, 2018. Claimant participated personally. Employer participated by Barb McCollom, Human Resources Generalist. Employer's Exhibits 1-4 and Claimant's Exhibit A were admitted into evidence.

**ISSUE:**

Whether claimant is able and available for work?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant began working for employer as a full-time corrections officer on January 3, 2017. Claimant became pregnant and began having complications in September, 2018.

On September 21, 2018, claimant provided employer with a note from her caregiver that placed restrictions on the work she could perform. Claimant was not allowed to lift over 25 pounds, and she was not allowed to be involved with strenuous activity including physical contact.

As a corrections officer, claimant's duties require her to have physical contact with others. Employer reviewed its policy, and claimant's work duties. Employer determined that it was not able to accommodate claimant's medical restrictions. Claimant's illness was not work related.

**REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes that the claimant is not able to work and available for work effective September 23, 2018.

Iowa Code section 96.4(3) provides:

An unemployed individual shall be eligible to receive benefits with respect to any week only if the department finds that:

3. The individual is able to work, is available for work, and is earnestly and actively seeking work. This subsection is waived if the individual is deemed partially unemployed, while employed at the individual's regular job, as defined in section 96.19, subsection 38, paragraph "b", unnumbered paragraph (1), or temporarily unemployed as defined in section 96.19, subsection 38, paragraph "c". The work search requirements of this subsection and the disqualification requirement for failure to apply for, or to accept suitable work of section 96.5, subsection 3 are waived if the individual is not disqualified for benefits under section 96.5, subsection 1, paragraph "h".

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(1)a provides:

**Benefits eligibility conditions.** For an individual to be eligible to receive benefits the department must find that the individual is able to work, available for work, and earnestly and actively seeking work. The individual bears the burden of establishing that the individual is able to work, available for work, and earnestly and actively seeking work.

(1) *Able to work.* An individual must be physically and mentally able to work in some gainful employment, not necessarily in the individual's customary occupation, but which is engaged in by others as a means of livelihood.

a. *Illness, injury or pregnancy.* Each case is decided upon an individual basis, recognizing that various work opportunities present different physical requirements. A statement from a medical practitioner is considered prima facie evidence of the physical ability of the individual to perform the work required. A pregnant individual must meet the same criteria for determining ableness as do all other individuals.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.23(35) provides:

**Availability disqualifications.** The following are reasons for a claimant being disqualified for being unavailable for work.

(35) Where the claimant is not able to work and is under the care of a medical practitioner and has not been released as being able to work.

To be able to work, "[a]n individual must be physically and mentally able to work in some gainful employment, not necessarily in the individual's customary occupation, but which is engaged in by others as a means of livelihood." *Sierra v. Employment Appeal Board*, 508 N.W.2d 719, 721 (Iowa 1993); *Geiken v. Lutheran Home for the Aged*, 468 N.W.2d 223 (Iowa 1991); Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(1). "An evaluation of an individual's ability to work for the purposes of determining that individual's eligibility for unemployment benefits must necessarily take into consideration the economic and legal forces at work in the general labor market in which the individual resides." *Sierra* at 723. The court in *Gilmore v. Empl. Appeal Bd.*, 695 N.W.2d 44 (Iowa Ct. App. 2004) noted that "[i]nsofar as the Employment Security Law is not designed to provide health and disability insurance, only those employees who experience illness-induced separations that can fairly be attributed to the employer are properly eligible for unemployment benefits." *White v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 487 N.W.2d 342, 345 (Iowa 1992) (citing *Butts v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 328 N.W.2d 515, 517 (Iowa 1983)).

Subsection d of Iowa Code § 96.5(1) provides an exception where:

The individual left employment because of illness, injury or pregnancy upon the advice of a licensed and practicing physician, and upon knowledge of the necessity for absence immediately notified the employer, or the employer consented to the absence, and after recovering from the illness, injury or pregnancy, when recovery was certified by a licensed and practicing physician, the individual returned to the employer and offered to perform services and ...

the individual's regular work or comparable suitable work was not available, if so found by the department, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

The statute specifically requires that the employee has recovered from the illness or injury, and this recovery has been certified by a physician. The exception in section 96.5(1)(d) only applies when an employee is *fully* recovered and the employer has not held open the employee's position. *White*, 487 N.W.2d at 346; *Hedges v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 368 N.W.2d 862, 867 (Iowa Ct. App. 1985); see also *Geiken v. Lutheran Home for the Aged Ass'n.*, 468 N.W.2d 223, 226 (Iowa 1991) (noting the full recovery standard of section 96.5(1)(d)).

The Supreme Court ruled that a claimant with a non-work related injury was not able to and available for work and that section 96.5(1)d was not applicable when she returned to work with a restricted release, could not perform her prior job and could not establish any other type of work of which she was capable. *Geiken v. Lutheran Home for the Aged*, 468 N.W.2d 223 (Iowa 1991).

Inasmuch as the medical condition is not work-related and the treating physician has not released the claimant to return to work without restriction, she has not established her ability to work while still an employee of Scott County beginning on September 23, 2018. While she may be able to perform light work duties, the employer is not obligated to accommodate a non-work related medical condition, and since she has not been released to perform her full work duties, she is not considered able to or available for work. Benefits are withheld until such time as the claimant obtains a full medical release to return to work.

**DECISION:**

The decision of the representative dated October 16, 2018 (reference 01) is reversed. Claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, effective September 23, 2018. Benefits are withheld until such time as the claimant obtains a full medical release to return to work, offers her services to the employer, and no suitable, comparable work is available considering reasonable accommodation; or if she is involuntarily separated before that time.

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Duane L. Golden  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

dlg/scn