

**IN THE IOWA ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS DIVISION
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

CHRISTOPHER MORALES
Claimant

APPEAL 23A-UI-10466-SN-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**IOWA WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**OC: 02/19/23
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.4(3) – Ability to and Availability for Work
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(2) – Able & Available - Benefits Eligibility Conditions

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant, Christopher Morales, filed an appeal from the November 2, 2023, (reference 08) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits for the week ending October 14, 2023, based upon the conclusion he did not meet the work search requirements for that week. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on November 28, 2023. The claimant participated. The appeal was heard jointly with 23A-UI-10465-SN-T.

ISSUE:

Did the claimant make an adequate work search for the week ending October 14, 2023, and was the warning appropriate?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds:

The claimant has an associate degree in video production and film editing. Most of his work experience has been cooking and working in kitchens. The claimant lives in Perry, but he has been looking for work in or near the Des Moines metropolitan area.

The claimant received a work search warning for the week ending September 30, 2023.

During the week of October 14, 2023, the claimant submitted four separate applications to four separate employers. One was a waiter position at a restaurant. One was a sales professional position. One was to drive a delivery vehicle. The final one a courier position. The claimant did not hear back from any of the employers.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The administrative law judge concludes that the claimant has made an active and earnest search for work for the week ending October 14, 2023. Benefits are granted, provided he is otherwise eligible.

Iowa Code section 96.4(3)a provides:

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

3. a. 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 96.1A, subsection 37, paragraph "b", subparagraph (1), or temporarily unemployed as defined in section 96.1A, subsection 37, 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 provides, in relevant part:

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.

...

(2) Available for work. The availability requirement is satisfied when an individual is willing, able, and ready to accept suitable work which the individual does not have good cause to refuse, that is, the individual is genuinely attached to the labor market. Since, under unemployment insurance laws, it is the availability of an individual that is required to be tested, the labor market must be described in terms of the individual. A labor market for an individual means a market for the type of service which the individual offers in the geographical area in which the individual offers the service. Market in that sense does not mean that job vacancies must exist; the purpose of unemployment insurance is to compensate for lack of job vacancies. It means only that the type of services which an individual is offering is generally performed in the geographical area in which the individual is offering the services.

...

(3) Earnestly and actively seeking work. Mere registration at a workforce development center does not establish that the individual is earnestly and actively seeking work. It is essential that the individual personally and diligently search for work. It is difficult to establish definite criteria for defining the words earnestly and actively. Much depends on the estimate of the employment opportunities in the area. The number of employer contacts which might be appropriate in an area of limited opportunity might be totally unacceptable in other areas. When employment opportunities are high an individual may be

expected to make more than the usual number of contacts. Unreasonable limitations by an individual as to salary, hours or conditions of work can indicate that the individual is not earnestly seeking work. The department expects each individual claiming benefits to conduct themselves as would any normal, prudent individual who is out of work.

a. Basic requirements. An individual shall be ineligible for benefits for any period for which the department finds that the individual has failed to make an earnest and active search for work. The circumstances in each case are considered in determining whether an earnest and active search for work has been made. Subject to the foregoing, applicable actions of the following kind are considered an earnest and active search for work if found by the department to constitute a reasonable means of securing work by the individual, under the facts and circumstances of the individual's particular situation:

(1) Making application with employers as may reasonably be expected to have openings suitable to the individual.

(2) Registering with a placement facility of a school, college, or university if one is available in the individual's occupation or profession.

(3) Making application or taking examination for openings in the civil service of a governmental entity with reasonable prospects of suitable work for the individual.

(4) Responding to appropriate "want ads" for work which appears suitable to the individual if the response is made in writing or in person or electronically.

(5) Any other action which the department finds to constitute an effective means of securing work suitable to the individual.

(6) No individual, however, is denied benefits solely on the ground that the individual has failed or refused to register with a private employment agency or at any other placement facility which charges the job-seeker a fee for its services. However, an individual may count as one of the work contacts required for the week an in-person contact with a private employment agency.

(7) An individual is considered to have failed to make an effort to secure work if the department finds that the individual has followed a course of action designed to discourage prospective employers from hiring the individual in suitable work.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.23(28) provides:

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

(28) A claimant will be ineligible for benefits because of failure to make an adequate work search after having been previously warned and instructed to expand the search for work effort.

The relevant laws are Iowa Code section 96.4(3)a, Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22, and Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.23(28). Nowhere in those laws does it state that three of the claimant's

work searches must be applications. The Iowa Workforce Development Department's own rules clearly state differently. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(3) states first a general description:

It is difficult to establish definite criteria for defining the words earnestly and actively. Much depends on the estimate of the employment opportunities in the area. The number of employer contacts which might be appropriate in an area of limited opportunity might be totally unacceptable in other areas. When employment opportunities are high an individual may be expected to make more than the usual number of contacts.

The standard work search warning decision says the claimant must make four work searches per week, three of which must be job applications. The general description of how the law operates in this section flies in the face of what the standard work search warning decision says it is. The law asks for a multi-factored approach and an appreciation for the circumstances the claimant is facing. It lists the various ways that someone can do a work search. See Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(1) – (7). There is absolutely no basis for categorically ranking applications as higher than other work search activities in that law or other laws relevant to this case.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(3) continues by describing the basic requirements. The highlighted portion also contradicts Iowa Workforce Development Department's position that it is a fixed number of searches for week. Quite the contrary, Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(3) restates the approach given above that looks at the individual's circumstances.

1. Basic requirements. An individual shall be ineligible for benefits for any period for which the department finds that the individual has failed to make an earnest and active search for work. **The circumstances in each case are considered in determining whether an earnest and active search for work has been made.** Subject to the foregoing, applicable actions of the following kind are considered an earnest and active search for work if found by the department to constitute a reasonable means of securing work by the individual, **under the facts and circumstances of the individual's particular situation. [Emphasis added.]**

Assigning a fixed minimum number of work searches or mandating that three of the work searches be job applications has no basis in law. This is important because most claimants naturally rely on Iowa Workforce Development Department to accurately state the legal requirements for work searches. This case is illustrative because the claimant asks on the hearing record if he must do a workshop. While this is a misreading of the work search warning decision, the line of reasoning is natural because the focus at least appears to be on numerosity and little else.

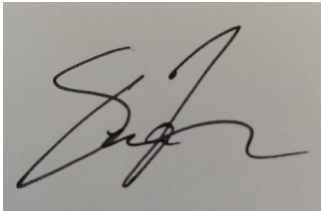
The evaluation is not whether someone has met an arbitrary number Iowa Workforce Development Department has set for everyone statewide. The evaluation is whether this individual is sincerely looking for work, as a reasonable unemployed person would, given their individual circumstances. This rule was also amended on October 12, 2022. Iowa Workforce Development Department could have made changes to the above sections on that date with other changes. It did not.

The claimant submitted four applications to four separate employers. Although the search was not narrowly tailored to the claimant's work experience for all four, none of the applications are

for jobs that would be implausible or unreasonable to secure with his background. Overall, the administrative law judge finds the claimant made a sincere effort that week to find work.¹

DECISION:

The November 2, 2023, (reference 08), unemployment insurance decision is REVERSED. The claimant made an adequate search for work for the week ending October 14, 2023. Benefits are granted for that week, provided he is otherwise eligible for benefits.



Sean M. Nelson
Administrative Law Judge II

November 30, 2023
Decision Dated and Mailed

smn/scn

¹ On the hearing record, the claimant asked if his classes at Des Moines Area Community College would be considered work activities. The administrative law judge finds them not to be because for something to be an activity it must be aligned to speedily return the claimant to the workforce. Semester long classes are undoubtedly beneficial for the long-term, but due to their duration cannot be suitable means of securing work quickly.

APPEAL RIGHTS. If you disagree with the decision, you or any interested party may:

1. Appeal to the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days of the date under the judge's signature by submitting a written appeal via mail, fax, or online to:

**Employment Appeal Board
6200 Park Avenue Suite 100
Des Moines, Iowa 50321
Fax: (515)281-7191
Online: eab.iowa.gov**

The appeal period will be extended to the next business day if the last day to appeal falls on a weekend or a legal holiday.

AN APPEAL TO THE BOARD SHALL STATE CLEARLY:

- 1) The name, address, and social security number of the claimant.
- 2) A reference to the decision from which the appeal is taken.
- 3) That an appeal from such decision is being made and such appeal is signed.
- 4) The grounds upon which such appeal is based.

An Employment Appeal Board decision is final agency action. If a party disagrees with the Employment Appeal Board decision, they may then file a petition for judicial review in district court.

2. If no one files an appeal of the judge's decision with the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days, the decision becomes final agency action, and you have the option to file a petition for judicial review in District Court within thirty (30) days after the decision becomes final. Additional information on how to file a petition can be found at Iowa Code §17A.19, which is online at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf> or by contacting the District Court Clerk of Court <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

Note to Parties: YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in the appeal or obtain a lawyer or other interested party to do so provided there is no expense to Workforce Development. If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, you may obtain the services of either a private attorney or one whose services are paid for with public funds.

Note to Claimant: It is important that you file your weekly claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

SERVICE INFORMATION:

A true and correct copy of this decision was mailed to each of the parties listed.

DERECHOS DE APELACIÓN. Si no está de acuerdo con la decisión, usted o cualquier parte interesada puede:

1. Apelar a la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo dentro de los quince (15) días de la fecha bajo la firma del juez presentando una apelación por escrito por correo, fax o en línea a:

**Employment Appeal Board
6200 Park Avenue Suite 100
Des Moines, Iowa 50321
Fax: (515)281-7191
Online: eab.iowa.gov**

El período de apelación se extenderá hasta el siguiente día hábil si el último día para apelar cae en fin de semana o día feriado legal.

UNA APELACIÓN A LA JUNTA DEBE ESTABLECER CLARAMENTE:

- 1) El nombre, dirección y número de seguro social del reclamante.
- 2) Una referencia a la decisión de la que se toma la apelación.
- 3) Que se interponga recurso de apelación contra tal decisión y se firme dicho recurso.
- 4) Los fundamentos en que se funda dicho recurso.

Una decisión de la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo es una acción final de la agencia. Si una de las partes no está de acuerdo con la decisión de la Junta de Apelación de Empleo, puede presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el tribunal de distrito.

2. Si nadie presenta una apelación de la decisión del juez ante la Junta de Apelaciones Laborales dentro de los quince (15) días, la decisión se convierte en acción final de la agencia y usted tiene la opción de presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el Tribunal de Distrito dentro de los treinta (30) días después de que la decisión adquiriera firmeza. Puede encontrar información adicional sobre cómo presentar una petición en el Código de Iowa §17A.19, que se encuentra en línea en <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf> o comunicándose con el Tribunal de Distrito Secretario del tribunal <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

Nota para las partes: USTED PUEDE REPRESENTARSE en la apelación u obtener un abogado u otra parte interesada para que lo haga, siempre que no haya gastos para Workforce Development. Si desea ser representado por un abogado, puede obtener los servicios de un abogado privado o uno cuyos servicios se paguen con fondos públicos.

Nota para el reclamante: es importante que presente su reclamo semanal según las instrucciones, mientras esta apelación está pendiente, para proteger su derecho continuo a los beneficios.

SERVICIO DE INFORMACIÓN:

Se envió por correo una copia fiel y correcta de esta decisión a cada una de las partes enumeradas.