

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

LAUREN CURTIS
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 09A-UI-11637-BT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

MID-STEP SERVICES INC
Employer

OC: 07/25/09
Claimant: Appellant (1)

Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a - Discharge for Misconduct
871 IAC 24.32(7) - Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Lauren Curtis (claimant) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated August 4, 2009, reference 01, which held that she was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits because she was discharged from Mid-Step Services, Inc. (employer) for work-related misconduct. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on August 27, 2009. The claimant participated in the hearing. The employer participated through Jan Hackett, Human Resources Director. Employer's Exhibits One through Six and Claimant's Exhibits A and B were admitted into evidence. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The employer is a non-profit agency providing residential care for mentally and physically challenged children and adults. The claimant was employed as a full-time residential living assistant from January 30, 2006 through July 7, 2009. She was discharged from employment due to excessive unexcused absenteeism with a final incident on July 6, 2009 when she failed to work due to lack of child care.

The employer's union contract provides that paid days off have to be scheduled in advance after the first three days and must be approved by the employee's supervisor. The employee must make the request more than 20 hours prior to the scheduled shift and the employer will provide a response in advance of the requested day off. Even if the request is timely, the employer does not automatically guarantee the requested time will be approved.

The claimant had a long-standing problem with excessive absenteeism. She received repeated warnings, notices and suspensions for absenteeism each year beginning in 2006. The claimant

received her first notice this year on April 7, 2009. The notice was issued because she had more than three unscheduled absences within six months. The claimant refused to sign the notice. Some of the absences fell off because they were outside the six-month period, but the claimant continued accruing absences and the disciplinary actions followed. A second notice was issued May 8, 2009, a written warning on June 9, 2009 and a suspension on June 16, 2009. Both warnings in June 2009 advised the claimant that her job was in jeopardy.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct. A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a.

Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

2. Discharge for misconduct. If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

a. The individual shall be disqualified for benefits until the individual has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the individual's weekly benefit amount, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

871 IAC 24.32(1)a provides:

Discharge for misconduct.

(1) Definition.

a. "Misconduct" is defined as a deliberate act or omission by a worker which constitutes a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of such worker's contract of employment. Misconduct as the term is used in the disqualification provision as being limited to conduct evincing such willful or wanton disregard of an employer's interest as is found in deliberate violation or disregard of standards of behavior which the employer has the right to expect of employees, or in carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design, or to show an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests or of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. On the other hand mere inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, failure in good performance as the result of inability or incapacity, inadvertencies or ordinary negligence in isolated instances, or good faith errors in judgment or discretion are not to be deemed misconduct within the meaning of the statute.

The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. Newman v.

Iowa Department of Job Service, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). The claimant was discharged on July 7, 2009 for excessive unexcused absenteeism.

871 IAC 24.32(7) provides:

(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. The term “absenteeism” also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as “tardiness.” An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984).

The employer has established that the claimant was warned that further unexcused absences could result in termination of employment and the final absence was not excused. The final absence, in combination with the claimant’s history of absenteeism, is considered excessive. Benefits are denied.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated August 4, 2009, reference 01, is affirmed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because she was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible.

Susan D. Ackerman
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

sda/pjs