

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

NOMAI JAMES
Claimant

WALMART INC
Employer

APPEAL 20A-UI-03954-JC-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 03/15/20
Claimant: Appellant (1R)

Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting
Iowa Code § 96.6(2) – Timeliness of Appeal
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment
PL116-136, Sec. 2104 – Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant/appellant, Nomai James, filed an appeal from the April 30, 2020 (reference 01) Iowa Workforce Development (“IWD”) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on May 28, 2020. The claimant participated personally. The employer, Walmart Inc., did not respond to the notice of hearing to furnish a phone number with the Appeals Bureau and did not participate in the hearing.

The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative records. Claimant Exhibit A (Appeal letter) was admitted. Based on the evidence, the arguments presented, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

NOTE TO CLAIMANT: You may find additional information about food, housing, and other resources by dialing 211 or at <https://dhs.iowa.gov/node/3250>

ISSUES:

Is the appeal timely?
Did claimant voluntarily quit the employment with good cause attributable to employer?
Is the claimant overpaid benefits?
Is the claimant eligible for Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed full-time as a jewelry associate and was separated from employment on September 6, 2019, when she quit the employment without notice.

The claimant walked off the job mid-shift, and did not notify the employer, or have permission. She left mid-shift because of her pregnancy related illness. The claimant did not contact the

employer after she went home, or make attempts to return to work. She stated she knew she would be discharged after she had called out a lot, and did not want to go back to work.

The claimant had her baby in November 2019. She began employment at Five Below Inc. in January 2020 but has separated from employment. The claimant's separation from Five Below Inc. has not yet been addressed by the Benefits Bureau. The claimant then began work for New Rue21 LLC., and is currently employed there. She has not requalified since her separation from Walmart Inc.

An initial unemployment insurance decision (Reference 01) resulting in a denial of benefits was mailed to the claimant's last known address of record on August 30, 2020. The decision contained a warning that an appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeals Bureau by May 10, 2020. Because May 10, 2020 was a Sunday, the final day to appeal was extended to Monday, May 11, 2020. The claimant attempted to contact IWD for guidance, as directed in the initial decision. She was told that her benefits were suspended but not informed she had to appeal. This lack of communication caused a delay in the claimant realizing she must appeal the decision. She filed the appeal on May 12, 2020, one day after the deadline (Claimant Exhibit A).

Despite being denied benefits after the initial fact-finding, the decision was made by Iowa Workforce Development to release funds of claimants while their claims were pending due to the backlog caused by the recent COVID 19 outbreak. Claimant was one of the individuals whose funds were released pending the initial decision. The administrative record shows, claimant filed for and received a total of \$1888.00 in regular unemployment insurance benefits since establishing her claim for benefits with an effective date of March 15, 2020.

The claimant also received federal unemployment insurance benefits through Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC). Claimant received \$2400.00 in federal benefits for the four-week period ending April 25, 2020.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The first issue to address is whether the claimant filed a timely appeal.

Iowa Code section 96.6(2) provides, in pertinent part:

Filing – determination – appeal.

The representative shall promptly examine the claim and any protest, take the initiative to ascertain relevant information concerning the claim, and, on the basis of the facts found by the representative, shall determine whether or not the claim is valid, the week with respect to which benefits shall commence, the weekly benefit amount payable and its maximum duration, and whether any disqualification shall be imposed. . . . Unless the claimant or other interested party, after notification or within ten calendar days after notification was mailed to the claimant's last known address, files an appeal from the decision, the decision is final and benefits shall be paid or denied in accordance with the decision.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.35(2) provides:

Date of submission and extension of time for payments and notices.

(2) The submission of any payment, appeal, application, request, notice, objection, petition, report or other information or document not within the specified statutory or regulatory period shall be considered timely if it is established to the satisfaction of the division that the delay in submission was due to division error or misinformation or to delay or other action of the United States postal service.

a. For submission that is not within the statutory or regulatory period to be considered timely, the interested party must submit a written explanation setting forth the circumstances of the delay.

b. The division shall designate personnel who are to decide whether an extension of time shall be granted.

c. No submission shall be considered timely if the delay in filing was unreasonable, as determined by the department after considering the circumstances in the case.

d. If submission is not considered timely, although the interested party contends that the delay was due to division error or misinformation or delay or other action of the United States postal service, the division shall issue an appealable decision to the interested party.

The ten calendar days for appeal begins running on the mailing date. The "decision date" found in the upper right-hand portion of the representative's decision, unless otherwise corrected immediately below that entry, is presumptive evidence of the date of mailing. *Gaskins v. Unempl. Comp. Bd. of Rev.*, 429 A.2d 138 (Pa. Comm. 1981); *Johnson v. Board of Adjustment*, 239 N.W.2d 873, 92 A.L.R.3d 304 (Iowa 1976).

The record in this case shows that more than ten calendar days elapsed between the mailing date and the date this appeal was filed. The Iowa Supreme Court has declared that there is a mandatory duty to file appeals from representatives' decisions within the time allotted by statute, and that the administrative law judge has no authority to change the decision of a representative if a timely appeal is not filed. *Franklin v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 277 N.W.2d 877, 881 (Iowa 1979). Compliance with appeal notice provisions is jurisdictional unless the facts of a case show that the notice was invalid. *Beardslee v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 276 N.W.2d 373, 377 (Iowa 1979); see also *In re Appeal of Elliott*, 319 N.W.2d 244, 247 (Iowa 1982). The question in this case thus becomes whether the appellant was deprived of a reasonable opportunity to assert an appeal in a timely fashion. *Hendren v. Iowa Emp't Sec. Comm'n*, 217 N.W.2d 255 (Iowa 1974); *Smith v. Iowa Emp't Sec. Comm'n*, 212 N.W.2d 471, 472 (Iowa 1973).

In this case, the claimant received the initial decision within the prescribed period to appeal. When she contacted IWD for guidance, as directed on the initial decision, she was given incomplete information from the Agency representative, which caused the delay in filing. Because the delay in filing was due to Agency error, the appeal shall be accepted as timely.

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant voluntarily quit the employment without good cause attributable to the employer. Benefits are denied.

Iowa Code section 96.5(1) provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits:

1. Voluntary quitting. If the individual has left work voluntarily without good cause attributable to the individual's employer, if so found by the department.

The claimant has the burden of proof to establish she quit with good cause attributable to the employer, according to Iowa law. "Good cause" for leaving employment must be that which is reasonable to the average person, not the overly sensitive individual or the claimant in particular. *Uniweld Products v. Industrial Relations Commission*, 277 So.2d 827 (Fla. App. 1973).

Ordinarily, "good cause" is derived from the facts of each case keeping in mind the public policy stated in Iowa Code section 96.2. *O'Brien v. EAB*, 494 N.W.2d 660, 662 (Iowa 1993)(citing *Wiese v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 389 N.W.2d 676, 680 (Iowa 1986)). "The term encompasses real circumstances, adequate excuses that will bear the test of reason, just grounds for the action, and always the element of good faith." *Wiese v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 389 N.W.2d 676, 680 (Iowa 1986) "[C]ommon sense and prudence must be exercised in evaluating all of the circumstances that lead to an employee's quit in order to attribute the cause for the termination." *Id.*

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.25(27) provides:

Voluntary quit without good cause. In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer from whom the employee has separated. The employer has the burden of proving that the claimant is disqualified for benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.5. However, the claimant has the initial burden to produce evidence that the claimant is not disqualified for benefits in cases involving Iowa Code section 96.5, subsection (1), paragraphs "a" through "i," and subsection 10. The following reasons for a voluntary quit shall be presumed to be without good cause attributable to the employer:

- (27) The claimant left rather than perform the assigned work as instructed.

In this case, the claimant voluntarily quit the employment when she walked off the job and chose not to return. The claimant was pregnant at the time, and did not request to take a leave of absence or take any steps to preserve her job. She stated she did not want to go back after leaving. While the claimant may have had personally compelling reasons to quit the employment, she has failed to establish a good cause reason attributable to the employer, according to Iowa law. Therefore, benefits are denied.

The claimant's January 2020 separation from Five Below Inc. is remanded to the Benefits Bureau of Iowa Workforce Development for an initial investigation and determination.

As claimant has received benefits to which she was not entitled, the next issue in this case is whether the claimant was overpaid unemployment insurance benefits.

Iowa Code § 96.3(7) provides, in pertinent part:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

- a. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is

not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

Since the decision disqualifying the claimant has been affirmed, the claimant was overpaid \$1888.00 in regular unemployment insurance benefits.

PL116-136, Sec. 2104 provides, in pertinent part:

(b) Provisions of Agreement

(1) Federal pandemic unemployment compensation.--Any agreement under this section shall provide that the State agency of the State will make payments of regular compensation to individuals in amounts and to the extent that they would be determined if the State law of the State were applied, with respect to any week for which the individual is (disregarding this section) otherwise entitled under the State law to receive regular compensation, as if such State law had been modified in a manner such that the amount of regular compensation (including dependents' allowances) payable for any week shall be equal to

(A) the amount determined under the State law (before the application of this paragraph), plus

(B) an additional amount of \$600 (in this section referred to as "Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation").

....

(f) Fraud and Overpayments

(2) Repayment.--In the case of individuals who have received amounts of Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation to which they were not entitled, the State shall require such individuals to repay the amounts of such Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation to the State agency...

Here, the claimant is disqualified from receiving regular unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. Accordingly, this also disqualifies claimant from receiving Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC). In addition to the regular UI benefits claimant received, she also received an additional \$2400.00 in FPUC benefits for the four-week period ending April 25, 2020. Claimant is required to repay those benefits.

While the claimant may not be eligible for regular State of Iowa unemployment insurance benefits, she may be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits that have been made available to claimants under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act ("Cares Act"). The Pandemic Unemployment Assistance ("PUA") section of the Cares Act discusses eligibility for claimants who are unemployed due to the Coronavirus. For claimants who are ineligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits under Iowa Code Chapter 96, they may be eligible under PUA.

Note to Claimant: This decision determines you are not eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits. If you disagree with this decision you may file an appeal to the Employment

Appeal Board by following the instructions on the first page of this decision. Individuals who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits, but who are currently unemployed for reasons related to COVID-19 may qualify for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). **You will need to apply for PUA to determine your eligibility under the program.** Additional information on how to apply for PUA can be found at <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/pua-information>.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated April 30, 2020, (reference 01) is affirmed. The appeal is timely. The claimant voluntarily quit the employment without good cause attributable to the employer. Benefits are withheld until such time as she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible.

The claimant has been overpaid \$1888.00 in regular unemployment insurance benefits. The claimant has also been overpaid \$2400.00 in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation. These overpayments must be repaid.

REMAND: The claimant's January 2020 separation from Five Below Inc. is remanded to the Benefits Bureau of Iowa Workforce Development for an initial investigation and determination.



Jennifer L. Beckman
Administrative Law Judge
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June 12, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

jlb/sam