

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

OCTAVIA WALTON
Claimant

EXPRESS SERVICES INC
Employer

APPEAL 15A-UI-13186-CL-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 11/08/15
Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) – Absenteeism

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed an appeal from the November 25, 2015, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon misconduct. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on December 17, 2015. Claimant participated. Employer participated through franchise owner, Holly Eichmann.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was last assigned as a general laborer at Winnebago from August 17, 2015, and was separated from employment on November 3, 2015, when she was terminated. Winnebago asked employer to replace claimant because she missed 73 hours of work since beginning the assignment in August. Claimant missed work because she injured her rib and finger. In both cases, claimant brought employer a doctor's note.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

A claimant is disqualified from receiving unemployment benefits if the employer discharged the individual for misconduct in connection with the claimant's employment. Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a. 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 Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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 term “absenteeism” also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as “tardiness.” *Higgins v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190 (Iowa 1984).

In order to show misconduct due to absenteeism, the employer must establish the claimant had excessive absences that were unexcused. Thus, the first step in the analysis is to determine whether the absences were unexcused. The requirement of “unexcused” can be satisfied in two ways. The requirement of “unexcused” can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for “reasonable grounds,” *Higgins* at 191, or because it was not “properly reported,” holding excused absences are those “with appropriate notice.” *Cosper* at 10. Absences due to properly reported illness are excused, even if the employer was fully within its rights to assess points or impose discipline up to or including discharge for the absence under its attendance policy. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7); *Cosper*, supra; *Gaborit v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 734 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). Medical documentation is not essential to a determination that an absence due to illness should be treated as excused. *Gaborit*, supra. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins*, supra. However, a good faith inability to obtain childcare for a sick infant may be excused. *McCourtney v. Imprimis Tech., Inc.*, 465 N.W.2d 721 (Minn. Ct. App. 1991). The second step in the analysis is to determine whether the unexcused absences were excessive. The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins* at 192.

Here, employer has not established claimant had any unexcused absences. Claimant’s absences were due to injuries and are excused for purposes of unemployment law. Employer failed to establish claimant was terminated for misconduct.

DECISION:

The November 25, 2015, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. Benefits withheld based upon this separation shall be paid to claimant.

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Decision Dated and Mailed

cal/pjs