

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

MATEESHIA LOVELADY
Claimant

IOWA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
Employer

APPEAL NO. 15A-UI-13911-B2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 11/22/15
Claimant: Respondent (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.3-7 – Recovery of Overpayment of Benefits
871 IA Admin. Code 24(10) – Employer Participation in Fact Finding

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Employer filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated December 21, 2015, reference 02, which held claimant eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on January 11, 2016. Employer participated by hearing representative Paul Jahnke with witnesses Andy Craig, Jessica Billings, Ashley Cooper, and Lauren Hovey. Claimant failed to respond to the hearing notice in a timely manner and did not participate.

ISSUES:

Whether claimant was discharged for misconduct?

Whether claimant was overpaid benefits?

If claimant was overpaid benefits, should claimant repay benefits or should employer be charged due to employer's participation or lack thereof in fact finding?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: This matter was originally set for hearing at 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. on January 11, 2016. Notices of Hearing were sent to all parties listing two hearings at the two different hours. Both hearings involved the same claimant and employer, the same employment and the same facts and circumstances. The Appeals Bureau of IWD sent out two different notices as there were two different reference numbers. The first reference number (01) appeared as case number 13910 and listed an incorrect employer number. The second reference number (02) appeared as case number 13911 and listed the correct employer number. Both Notices of Appeal were sent to all parties.

The Notices of Appeal listed 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. hearings. At the time of the 2:00 p.m. hearing, employer had registered all of its witnesses. Employer had appealed this matter, so it was necessary that employer appear for the hearing in order for the hearing to move ahead. Claimant did not register for the hearing. The entire hearing was conducted, and at no time during the hearing did the claimant call in. At the close of the hearing, the Administrative Law Judge instructed all parties to remain available, just in case the claimant were to call in for the 3:00 p.m. hearing. At 3:00 p.m., the claimant still hadn't registered. At 3:11pm claimant called in to register. The Administrative Law Judge called the claimant to ask why claimant had not called in for the 2:00 p.m. hearing. Claimant stated that she had not understood the instructions on how to register, and only realized to call in to the IWD office at the later time.

Employer had not stated this previously, but admitted at 3:20 p.m. when the court attempted to gather parties that his main witness (victim), and the only person who testified hearing claimant make threats was unable to testify. Said witness did not answer her phone when the Administrative Law Judge attempted to call her after 3:20 p.m. The Administrative Law Judge explained to claimant that her reason for not registering in a timely basis did not constitute good cause.

Employer discharged claimant on November 18, 2015 because claimant had threatened to kick a coworker in the face on November 17, 2015. Said threat was in violation of administrative policies and an employee handbook given to claimant upon her hire.

On November 17, 2015 claimant and two other coworkers from the crawling preschool room had to take their class to the walking preschool room as there was water leaking in the crawling room. Upon entering the other room claimant commented about how poorly kept this other room was. Claimant then started telling a younger coworker from the walking room to, "shut up", and "nothing you say matters." Ashley Cooper told the younger girl to come and sit by her. At this time, claimant became more upset and stated that she wanted to kick Ashley in the head.

Ashley was very upset from this statement/threat. As the daycare director was no longer in the building, Ashley expressed what happened to the director early the next morning. Early the next morning claimant told Lauren Hovey that she had stated to Ashley the previous day that she wanted to kick Ashley in the head. When Ms. Hovey asked her why she wanted to do this, claimant responded that Ms. Cooper just rubbed her the wrong way.

When the director heard of these statements, she called claimant into the office. Claimant denied making the statements. The director then called the school principal and stated that she would like the claimant to be dismissed. The principal then came to the class and dismissed the claimant. Claimant had not received a warning for inappropriate statements, intimidation, or harassment prior to her termination.

Employer did not offer much information at the time of the fact-finding interview as there was confusion as to the date of the interview. Additionally, the interview was held prior to the date when the employer's response was due to be filed with IWD.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

Iowa Code § 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Huntoon v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

Iowa Code § 96.3-7, as amended in 2008, provides:

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.

b. (1) If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5. However, provided the benefits were not received as the result of fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual, benefits shall not be recovered from an individual if the employer did not participate in the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to section 96.6, subsection 2, and an overpayment occurred because of a subsequent reversal on appeal regarding the issue of the individual's separation from employment. The employer shall not be charged with the benefits.

(2) An accounting firm, agent, unemployment insurance accounting firm, or other entity that represents an employer in unemployment claim matters and demonstrates a continuous pattern of failing to participate in the initial determinations to award benefits, as determined and defined by rule by the department, shall be denied permission by the department to represent any employers in unemployment insurance matters. This subparagraph does not apply to attorneys or counselors admitted to practice in the courts of this state pursuant to section 602.10101.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if un rebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)"b" as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

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 § 96.5-2-a. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982), Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a.

In order to establish misconduct as to disqualify a former employee from benefits an employer must establish the employee was responsible for a deliberate act or omission which was a material breach of the duties and obligations owed by the employee to the employer. Rule 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 275 N.W.2d 445 (Iowa 1979); *Henry v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986). The conduct must show a 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 the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. Rule 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon* supra; *Henry* supra.

The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. In this matter, the evidence established that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated employer's policy concerning threats of violence.

The last incident, which brought about the discharge, constitutes misconduct because employer has a right to demand a workplace where there are no threats of violence between coworkers. The administrative law judge holds that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct and, as such, is disqualified for the receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

The overpayment issue is remanded to the fact finder.

The issue of employer participation was addressed. Employer did substantially participate in fact finding. Although employer answered the phone, employer was not aware that fact finding was going to take place when it did, and employer did not have documents or testimony which would have supported employer's assertions.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated December 21, 2015, reference 02, is reversed. Unemployment insurance benefits shall be withheld until claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times claimant's weekly benefit amount, provided claimant is otherwise eligible. The issue of the amount of overpayment is remanded to the fact finder. Employer is deemed to have substantially participated in fact finding to the extent that employer's account will not be charged in this matter.

Blair A. Bennett
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

bab/pjs