

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

HARLEY MORSE

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 20A-UI-00998-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

KIDS BUSINESS OF DEWITT INC

Employer

OC: 12/29/19

Claimant: Respondent (1)

Iowa Code Section 96.5(2)(a) – Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the January 27, 2020, reference 03, decision that allowed benefits to the claimant provided she met all other eligibility requirements and that held the employer's account could be charged for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion that the claimant was discharged on October 7, 2019 for no disqualifying reason. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on February 19, 2020. Claimant Harley Morse did not provide a telephone number for the hearing and did not participate. Tricia Ludrof represented the employer and presented additional testimony through Kelli Markle. The administrative law judge took official notice of the Agency's record of benefits disbursed to the claimant and received Exhibits 1 through 4 into evidence. The administrative law judge took official notice of the fact-finding materials for the limited purpose of determining whether the employer participated in the fact-finding interview and, if not, whether the claimant engaged in fraud or intentional misrepresentation in connection with the fact-finding interview.

ISSUES:

Whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct in connection with the employment that disqualifies the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits.

Whether the employer's account may be charged.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Harley Morse was employed by Kids Business of DeWitt, Inc. as a part-time Teacher Assistant from September 4, 2019 until October 7, 2019, when the employer discharged her for attendance. If Ms. Morse needed to be absent from work, the employer's attendance policy required that Ms. Morse call the child care center at least two hours prior to the scheduled start of her shift to give notice to the employer. The employer reviewed the attendance policy with Ms. Morse at the start of the employment. Ms. Morse's work hours were 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Kelli Markle, Onsite Supervisor, was Ms. Morse's immediate supervisor. Ms. Morse is the mother of an infant child who was seven to 10 weeks old at the time Ms. Morse began the employment.

The final absence that triggered the discharge occurred on October 4, 2019, when Ms. Morse was absent due to the need to care for her sick infant and properly reported the absence. Ms. Morse had also been absent on October 3, 2019 for the same reason and with proper notice to the employer. October 2, 2019, when Ms. Morse left work early due to illness. Ms. Morse spoke to Ms. Markle about her illness and her need to leave work before she departed from the workplace.

The employer considered three additional absences when making the decision to discharge Ms. Morse from the employment. On September 4, 24 and 26, Ms. Morse was absent due to the need to care for her sick infant and properly reported the absence. On September 27, 2019, Ms. Markle spoke to Ms. Morse about her attendance issues, about Ms. Morse's probationary status, and about the employer's need to maintain state-mandated staffing ratios.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)(a) provides:

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

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 disqualification shall continue 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).

The employer has the burden of proof in this matter. See Iowa Code section 96.6(2). Misconduct must be substantial in order to justify a denial of unemployment benefits.

Misconduct serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits. See *Lee v. Employment Appeal Board*, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. See *Gimbel v. Employment Appeal Board*, 489 N.W.2d 36, 39 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992).

While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of the current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act(s). The termination of employment must be based on a current act. See 871 IAC 24.32(8). In determining whether the conduct that prompted the discharge constituted a “current act,” the administrative law judge considers the date on which the conduct came to the attention of the employer and the date on which the employer notified the claimant that the conduct subjected the claimant to possible discharge. See also *Greene v. EAB*, 426 N.W.2d 659, 662 (Iowa App. 1988).

Allegations of misconduct or dishonesty without additional evidence shall not be sufficient to result in disqualification. If the employer is unwilling to furnish available evidence to corroborate the allegation, misconduct cannot be established. See 871 IAC 24.32(4).

In order for a claimant's absences to constitute misconduct that would disqualify the claimant from receiving unemployment insurance benefits, the evidence must establish that the claimant's *unexcused* absences were excessive. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(7). The determination of whether absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. However, the evidence must first establish that the most recent absence that prompted the decision to discharge the employee was unexcused. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.32(8). Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation and oversleeping are considered unexcused. On the other hand, absences related to illness are considered excused, provided the employee has complied with the employer's policy regarding notifying the employer of the absence. Tardiness is a form of absence. See *Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). Employers may not graft on additional requirements to what is an excused absence under the law. See *Gaborit v. Employment Appeal Board*, 743 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). For example, an employee's failure to provide a doctor's note in connection with an absence that was due to illness properly reported to the employer will not alter the fact that such an illness would be an excused absence under the law. *Gaborit*, 743 N.W.2d at 557.

The evidence in the record establishes a discharge for no disqualifying reason. All of the absences that factored in the discharge were excused absences under the applicable law. All of the absences were properly reported to the employer. All but one of the absences was due to Ms. Morse's need to care for her sick infant. The remaining absence was based on Ms. Morse's personal illness. While it was within the employer's discretion to terminate the at-will employment, the discharge was not based on misconduct within the meaning of the unemployment insurance law. Ms. Morse is eligible for benefits, provided she meets all other eligibility requirements. The employer's account may be charged for benefits.

DECISION:

The January 27, 2020, reference 03, decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged on October 7, 2019 for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.

James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jet/scn