

**IOWA DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTIONS AND APPEALS  
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS DIVISION, UI APPEALS BUREAU**

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**HEATHER R SZAKACS**  
Claimant

**APPEAL NO. 23A-UI-02985-JT-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**PILOT TRAVEL CENTERS LLC**  
Employer

**OC: 01/29/23  
Claimant: Appellant (1)**

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Iowa Code Section 96.6(2) – Timeliness of Appeal  
Iowa Code Section 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quit

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

On March 20, 2023, Heather Szakacs (claimant) filed a late appeal from the February 21, 2023 (reference 01) decision that disqualified the claimant for benefits and that held the employer's account would not be charged for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion the claimant voluntarily quit on January 18, 2023 without good cause attributable to the employer. After due notice was issued, a hearing was commenced on April 5, 2023 and concluded on April 11, 2023. Claimant participated and waived 10-day notice of the hearing. Marshall Todd represented the employer and presented additional testimony through Morgan Reid. Exhibit A, the online appeal, was received into evidence. Exhibits 1 through 5 were received into evidence. Exhibit 6, was not relevant and was not received into evidence. The administrative law judge took official notice of the following Iowa Workforce Development and Appeals Bureau administrative records: the February 21, 2023 (reference 01) decision and the returned appeal hearing notices.

**ISSUE:**

Whether the appeal was timely. Whether there is good cause to treat the appeal as timely.

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds:

Heather Szakacs (claimant) established an original claim for benefits that was effective January 29, 2023. At that time, the claimant provided an incomplete Cedar Rapids mailing address. The address the claimant provided included the street name, the building number, the city and the zip code, but knowingly omitted her apartment number. The claimant most recently resided at that address of record on February 1, 2023 and was at that time evicted from the residence. The claimant became homeless and commenced residing in a storage unit or storage garage. The claimant did not contact Iowa Workforce Development with an updated address of record because she did not have one. The claimant also did not contact the United States Postal Service to complete a mail forwarding request because she did not have a new

mailing address. The claimant has at all relevant times had access to her active email address and phone service through a Gmail account and her cell phone.

On February 17, 2023, the claimant participated in a telephonic fact-finding interview that addressed her separation from employer Pilot Travel Centers, L.L.C. The claimant did not mention her homeless circumstances to the Iowa Workforce Development Benefits Bureau deputy. The deputy told the claimant to expect a decision in the mail and discussed appeal rights.

On February 21, 2023, Iowa Workforce Development mailed the February 21, 2023 (reference 01) decision to the claimant's last-known address of record, the incomplete address the claimant provided when she established her original claim. The reference 01 decision disqualified the claimant for benefits and held that the employer's account would not be charged for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion the claimant voluntarily quit on January 18, 2023 without good cause attributable to the employer. The reference 01 decision stated the decision would become final unless an appeal was postmarked by March 3, 2023 or was received by the Appeals Section by that date. The claimant did not receive the decision that IWD mailed to her on February 21, 2023. The claimant did not file an appeal by the March 3, 2023 appeal deadline.

On March 13, 2023, the claimant contacted Iowa Workforce Development regarding the status of her unemployment insurance claim. At that time, an IWD representative told the claimant about the February 21, 2023 (reference 01) decision that disqualified the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits.

On March 20, 2023, the claimant completed and transmitted a late online appeal from the February 21, 2023 (reference 01) decision. The Appeals Bureau received the decision on March 20, 2023. In the online appeal, the claimant indicated she was homeless and provided her address as General Delivery, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52403. The claimant advises she added the General Delivery mailing address at the suggestion of an IWD representative.

On March 22, 2023, the Appeals Bureau mailed a hearing notice to the claimant's address of record and the General Delivery mailing address. The United States Postal Service returned both hearing notices due to "Insufficient Address Unable to Forward." The administrative law judge subsequently provided notice to the claimant of the appeal hearing via her email address.

#### **REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

Iowa Code section 96.6(2) provides:

2. Initial determination. A representative designated by the director shall promptly notify all interested parties to the claim of its filing, and the parties have ten days from the date of mailing the notice of the filing of the claim by ordinary mail to the last known address to protest payment of benefits to the claimant. 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. The claimant has the burden of proving that the claimant meets the basic eligibility conditions of section 96.4. The employer has the burden of proving that the claimant is disqualified for benefits pursuant to section 96.5, except as provided by this subsection. The claimant has the initial burden to produce evidence showing that the claimant is not disqualified for benefits in cases involving

section 96.5, subsections 10 and 11, and has the burden of proving that a voluntary quit pursuant to section 96.5, subsection 1, was for good cause attributable to the employer and that the claimant is not disqualified for benefits in cases involving section 96.5, subsection 1, paragraphs "a" through "h". 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. If an administrative law judge affirms a decision of the representative, or the appeal board affirms a decision of the administrative law judge allowing benefits, the benefits shall be paid regardless of any appeal which is thereafter taken, but if the decision is finally reversed, no employer's account shall be charged with benefits so paid and this relief from charges shall apply to both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5.

The ten-day deadline for appeal begins to run on the date Workforce Development mails the decision to the parties. The "decision date" found in the upper right-hand portion of the Agency 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).

An appeal submitted by mail is deemed filed on the date it is mailed as shown by the postmark or in the absence of a postmark the postage meter mark of the envelope in which it was received, or if not postmarked or postage meter marked or if the mark is illegible, on the date entered on the document as the date of completion. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.35(1)(a). See also *Messina v. IDJS*, 341 N.W.2d 52 (Iowa 1983). An appeal submitted by any other means is deemed filed on the date it is received by the Unemployment Insurance Division of Iowa Workforce Development. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.35(1)(b).

The evidence in the record establishes 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. IDJS*, 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. IDJS*, 276 N.W.2d 373, 377 (Iowa 1979); see also *In re Appeal of Elliott*, 319 N.W.2d 244, 247 (Iowa 1982). One 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. IESC*, 217 N.W.2d 255 (Iowa 1974); *Smith v. IESC*, 212 N.W.2d 471, 472 (Iowa 1973).

No submission shall be considered timely if the delay in filing was unreasonable, as determined by the division after considering the circumstances in the case. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.35(2)(c).

The evidence in the record establishes an untimely appeal from the February 21, 2023 (reference 01) decision. The claimant filed a late appeal on March 20, 2023. The claimant had knowingly provided a defective, incomplete mailing address when she established her claim for benefits during the week that started January 29, 2023. That by itself would have prevented the claimant's mail from being delivered to the address of record. Though the claimant ceased residing at the address of record on February 1, 2023, the claimant failed to mention her homeless status or lack of a mailing address to the IWD deputy at the time of the February 17,

2023 fact-finding interview, even after the deputy told the claimant that the decision would be mailed. The claimant was on notice as of February 17, 2023 that a decision regarding her eligibility for benefits would be forthcoming. The claimant was also on notice as of February 17, 2023 that there was a deadline for filing an appeal from that decision. Though the claimant was without a working mailing address, she continued to have access to her phone and her email account. Given the claimant's circumstances, a reasonable person would wonder why the claimant waited for almost a month after the fact-finding interview to inquire about the decision, rather than calling IWD sooner, or daily, to inquire about the eligibility determination. Even after the claimant contacted IWD on March 13, 2023, she elected to wait a whole additional week to file the appeal. The administrative law is sympathetic to the claimant circumstances with reason. However, the evidence indicates the delay in learning of the decision and in filing the appeal was attributable to unreasonable conduct and delay on the part of the claimant. The late filing of the appeal was not attributable to Iowa Workforce Development error or misinformation or delay or other action of the United States Postal Service. There is not good cause, as defined by the law, to treat the late appeal as a timely appeal. See Iowa Administrative Code rule 871-24.35(2). Because the appeal was untimely, the administrative law judge lacks jurisdiction to disturb the decision from which the appellant appeals in the present matter. See *Beardslee v. IDJS*, 276 N.W.2d 373 (Iowa 1979) and *Franklin v. IDJS*, 277 N.W.2d 877 (Iowa 1979).

**DECISION:**

The claimant's appeal from the February 21, 2023 (reference 01) decision was untimely. The decision that disqualified the claimant for benefits and that relieved the employer of liability for benefits, based on the deputy's conclusion the claimant voluntarily quit on January 18, 2023 without good cause attributable to the employer, remains in effect.

In the event this decision regarding timeliness of appeal is reversed upon further appeal, there is sufficient evidence in the hearing record for a decision concerning the substantive issues without need for a further hearing.



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James E. Timberland  
Administrative Law Judge

April 19, 2023  
Decision Dated and Mailed

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**APPEAL RIGHTS.** If you disagree with the decision, you or any interested party may:

1. Appeal to the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days of the date under the judge's signature by submitting a written appeal via mail, fax, or online to:

**Employment Appeal Board  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor – Lucas Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
Fax: (515)281-7191  
Online: eab.iowa.gov**

The appeal period will be extended to the next business day if the last day to appeal falls on a weekend or a legal holiday.

**AN APPEAL TO THE BOARD SHALL STATE CLEARLY:**

- 1) The name, address, and social security number of the claimant.
- 2) A reference to the decision from which the appeal is taken.
- 3) That an appeal from such decision is being made and such appeal is signed.
- 4) The grounds upon which such appeal is based.

An Employment Appeal Board decision is final agency action. If a party disagrees with the Employment Appeal Board decision, they may then file a petition for judicial review in district court.

2. If no one files an appeal of the judge's decision with the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days, the decision becomes final agency action, and you have the option to file a petition for judicial review in District Court within thirty (30) days after the decision becomes final. Additional information on how to file a petition can be found at Iowa Code §17A.19, which is online at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf>.

**Note to Parties:** YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in the appeal or obtain a lawyer or other interested party to do so provided there is no expense to Workforce Development. If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, you may obtain the services of either a private attorney or one whose services are paid for with public funds.

**Note to Claimant:** It is important that you file your weekly claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

**SERVICE INFORMATION:**

A true and correct copy of this decision was mailed to each of the parties listed.

**DERECHOS DE APELACIÓN.** Si no está de acuerdo con la decisión, usted o cualquier parte interesada puede:

1. Apelar a la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo dentro de los quince (15) días de la fecha bajo la firma del juez presentando una apelación por escrito por correo, fax o en línea a:

**Employment Appeal Board  
4th Floor – Lucas Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
Fax: (515)281-7191  
En línea: eab.iowa.gov**

El período de apelación se extenderá hasta el siguiente día hábil si el último día para apelar cae en fin de semana o día feriado legal.

**UNA APELACIÓN A LA JUNTA DEBE ESTABLECER CLARAMENTE:**

- 1) El nombre, dirección y número de seguro social del reclamante.
- 2) Una referencia a la decisión de la que se toma la apelación.
- 3) Que se interponga recurso de apelación contra tal decisión y se firme dicho recurso.
- 4) Los fundamentos en que se funda dicho recurso.

Una decisión de la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo es una acción final de la agencia. Si una de las partes no está de acuerdo con la decisión de la Junta de Apelación de Empleo, puede presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el tribunal de distrito.

2. Si nadie presenta una apelación de la decisión del juez ante la Junta de Apelaciones Laborales dentro de los quince (15) días, la decisión se convierte en acción final de la agencia y usted tiene la opción de presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el Tribunal de Distrito dentro de los treinta (30) días después de que la decisión adquiriera firmeza. Puede encontrar información adicional sobre cómo presentar una petición en el Código de Iowa §17A.19, que está en línea en <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf>.

**Nota para las partes:** USTED PUEDE REPRESENTARSE en la apelación u obtener un abogado u otra parte interesada para que lo haga, siempre que no haya gastos para Workforce Development. Si desea ser representado por un abogado, puede obtener los servicios de un abogado privado o uno cuyos servicios se paguen con fondos públicos.

**Nota para el reclamante:** es importante que presente su reclamo semanal según las instrucciones, mientras esta apelación está pendiente, para proteger su derecho continuo a los beneficios.

**SERVICIO DE INFORMACIÓN:**

Se envió por correo una copia fiel y correcta de esta decisión a cada una de las partes enumeradas.