

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

VERONICA LAFONTAINE
Claimant

AK FOODS INC
Employer

APPEAL 21A-UI-11322-SN-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 1/31/21
Claimant: Appellant (1)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(1)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed an appeal from the April 15, 2021, (reference 03) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based upon the conclusion she was discharged due to violating a known company rule. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on July 9, 2021. The claimant participated and testified. The employer did not participate. Exhibits D-1 and D-2 were received into the record.

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:

A disqualification decision was mailed to claimant's last known address of record on April 15, 2021. The claimant did receive the decision within ten days. The decision contained a warning that an appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeals Section by April 25, 2021. (Exhibit D-1) The appeal was not filed until April 27, 2021, which is after the date noticed on the disqualification decision. (Exhibit D-2)

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct.

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 issuing the notice of the filing of the claim to protest payment of benefits to the claimant. All interested parties shall select a format as specified by the department to receive such

notifications. 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 issued, 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 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. 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). 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. IESC*, 217 N.W.2d 255 (Iowa 1974); *Smith v. IESC*, 212 N.W.2d 471, 472 (Iowa 1973).

It is the duty of the administrative law judge as the trier of fact in this case, to determine the credibility of witnesses, weigh the evidence and decide the facts in issue. *Arndt v. City of LeClaire*, 728 N.W.2d 389, 394-395 (Iowa 2007). The administrative law judge may believe all, part or none of any witness's testimony. *State v. Holtz*, 548 N.W.2d 162, 163 (Iowa App. 1996). In assessing the credibility of witnesses, the administrative law judge should consider the evidence using his or her own observations, common sense and experience. *Id.* In determining the facts, and deciding what testimony to believe, the fact finder may consider the following factors: whether the testimony is reasonable and consistent with other believable evidence; whether a witness has made inconsistent statements; the witness's appearance, conduct, age, intelligence, memory and knowledge of the facts; and the witness's interest in the trial, their motive, candor, bias and prejudice. *Id.*

After assessing the credibility of the claimant who testified during the hearing, considering the applicable factors listed above, and using his own common sense and experience, the administrative law judge finds the claimant's allegations regarding timeliness of appeal not credible.

The claimant wrote on her appeal, "I never received any papers regarding this matter. I was only told over the phone by someone at the local appeals office." Yet on the same appeal, the claimant said she could not give the approximate date the decision was received because she had "no idea." There was no mention of another appeal being filed on the claimant's appeal.

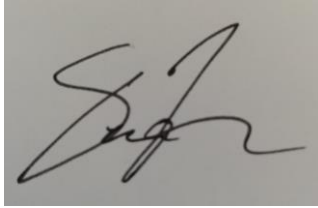
During the hearing, the claimant said she thought she received it, but she did not know when. It was only after the administrative law judge asked the claimant about the allegation on her appeal letter that she said she might not have received a decision. Then the claimant said for the first time she attempted to appeal before through Iowa Workforce Development's online appeal portal. She could not say when she made this other appeal. The clerk could not find a record of this other appeal. She went on to say she spoke with Chief Administrative Law Judge Nicole Merrill who informed the claimant that we had received her appeal. The administrative law judge does not find the allegations regarding another appeal or not receiving the decision credible due to these glaring inconsistencies.

The record shows that the appellant did have a reasonable opportunity to file a timely appeal and missed the deadline. The claimant has the burden to explain why her appeal has reasonable grounds to be considered timely. The claimant has not given a consistent credible explanation.

The administrative law judge concludes that failure to file a timely appeal within the time prescribed by the Iowa Employment Security Law was not due to any Agency error or misinformation or delay or other action of the United States Postal Service pursuant to 871 IAC 24.35(2). The administrative law judge further concludes that the appeal was not timely filed pursuant to Iowa Code § 96.6(2), and the administrative law judge lacks jurisdiction to make a determination with respect to the nature of the appeal. See *Beardslee v. IDJS*, 276 N.W.2d 373 (Iowa 1979) and *Franklin v. IDJS*, 277 N.W.2d 877 (Iowa 1979).

DECISION:

The April 15, 2021, (reference 03), decision is affirmed. The appeal in this case was not timely, and the decision of the representative remains in effect.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'S. Nelson'.

Sean M. Nelson
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax (515) 725-9067

July 19, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

smn/lj