

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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**JENNIFER S BEUKEMA**  
Claimant

**CATHOLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES IOWA**  
Employer

**APPEAL 21A-UI-07960-AD-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 01/03/21  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

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Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

On March 19, 2021, Jennifer Beukema (claimant/appellant) filed a timely appeal from the Iowa Workforce Development decision dated March 9, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant left employment voluntarily on January 4, 2021 without a showing of good cause.

A telephone hearing was held on May 28, 2021. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. The claimant participated personally. Catholic Health Initiatives - Iowa (employer/respondent) did not register a number for the hearing or participate.

Official notice was taken of the administrative record.

**ISSUE(S):**

- I. Was the separation from employment a layoff, discharge for misconduct, or voluntary quit without good cause?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

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

Claimant worked for employer full-time as an assistant professor in nursing. Claimant's first day of employment was May 2017. The last day claimant worked on the job was January 4, 2021. Employer told claimant on that date that she could either resign or she would be discharged. Employer did not give claimant a reason for presenting her with this ultimatum, even after claimant asked for more information. She had not been previously counseled or disciplined. Claimant does not know why the ultimatum was given. Claimant chose to resign rather than be discharged, as employer told her it would not contest her eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits if she did so.

## REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons set forth below, the decision dated March 9, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant left employment voluntarily on January 4, 2021 without a showing of good cause is REVERSED.

Claimant was compelled to resign when given the choice of resigning or being discharged. As such, her separation from employment was not voluntary. The separation must instead be analyzed as a discharge.

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 provides in relevant part:

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 bears the burden of proving that a claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). *Myers v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 462 N.W.2d 734, 737 (Iowa Ct. App. 1990). 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).

Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be “substantial.” *Newman v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a “wrongful intent” to be disqualifying in nature. *Newman, Id.* In contrast, 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. *Newman, Id.*

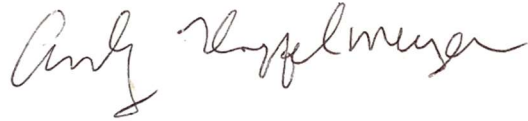
When reviewing an alleged act of misconduct, the finder of fact may consider past acts of misconduct to determine the magnitude of the current act. *Kelly v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 386 N.W.2d 552, 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986). However, conduct asserted to be disqualifying misconduct must be both specific and current. *West v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 489 N.W.2d 731 (Iowa 1992); *Greene v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 426 N.W.2d 659 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Because our unemployment compensation law is designed to protect workers from financial hardships when they become unemployed through no fault of their own, we construe the provisions “liberally to carry out its humane and beneficial purpose.” *Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc. v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 570 N.W.2d 85, 96 (Iowa 1997). “[C]ode provisions which operate to work a forfeiture of benefits are strongly construed in favor of the claimant.” *Diggs v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 478 N.W.2d 432, 434 (Iowa Ct. App. 1991).

Employer has not carried its burden of proving claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of a current act of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). There is no evidence in the record to support a finding of misconduct.

**DECISION:**

The decision dated March 9, 2021 (reference 01) that denied benefits based on a finding claimant left employment voluntarily on January 4, 2021 without a showing of good cause is REVERSED. The separation from employment was not disqualifying. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is not otherwise disqualified or ineligible.



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Andrew B. Duffelmeyer  
Administrative Law Judge  
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau  
1000 East Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209  
Fax (515) 478-3528

June 11, 2021  
Decision Dated and Mailed

abd/kmj