

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

RICHARDA L ERTMER
Claimant

FOCUS SERVICES LLC
Employer

APPEAL 20A-UI-07814-AD-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 05/03/20
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer/Representative Participation Fact-finding Interview

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

On July 17, 2020, Focus Services LLC (employer/appellant) filed an appeal from the July 7, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits.

A telephone hearing was held on August 17, 2020. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. Employer participated by Hearing Specialist Carleano Grant. HR Manager Angie Greve-Pratt participated as a witness for employer. Richarda Ertmer (claimant/respondent) participated personally.

Official notice was taken of the administrative record.

ISSUE(S):

- I. Was the separation a layoff, discharge for misconduct, or voluntary quit without good cause?
- II. Was the claimant overpaid benefits? Should claimant repay benefits and/or charge employer due to employer participation in fact finding?
- III. Is the claimant eligible for Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

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

Claimant worked for employer as a part-time customer service and sales agent. Claimant's first day of employment was May 31, 2018. The last day claimant worked on the job was April 12, 2020. Claimant's immediate supervisors were Nicole Meyer and Calvin Bradbury. Claimant separated from employment on May 5, 2020. Claimant voluntarily quit on that date.

Claimant requested and was granted a leave of absence from March 9 until April 27, 2020, to address health issues she was facing. Claimant was to return to work on April 27. However, she was still not feeling well and called in on that day and April 28 to report she would be absent due to illness.

Claimant spoke with Bradbury on May 1, 2020. Claimant reported she had a doctor appointment on May 4 and would provide a note excusing her absences after that. Bradbury told claimant he must have the doctor note by May 5 or she may be discharged. However, despite Bradbury's warning, claimant never provided a note or appeared for work as scheduled on May 4 or thereafter. Claimant chose not to provide the note or appear for work because she believed she would be discharged regardless of whether or not she provided the note and did not want to report for work only to be discharged.

Employer participated in the fact-finding interview by providing written documentation in response to a request for information from an IWD representative.

The unemployment insurance system shows claimant has received weekly benefits in the amount of \$220.00 for a total of 14 weeks, from the benefit week ending May 9, 2020 and continuing through the benefit week ending August 8, 2020. The total amount of benefits paid to date is \$3,080.00.

The unemployment insurance system shows claimant has received Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) in the amount of \$600.00 for a total of 12 weeks, totaling \$7,200.00.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons set forth below, the July 7, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits is REVERSED.

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

Iowa Code section 96.5(1)a provides:

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

1. Voluntary quitting. If the individual has left work voluntarily without good cause attributable to the individual's employer, if so found by the department.

Claimant has the burden of proving that the voluntary leaving was for good cause attributable to the employer. Iowa Code § 96.6(2). The employer has the burden of proving that a claimant's departure from employment was voluntary. *Irving v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 883 N.W.2d 179 (Iowa 2016). "In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer". *Id.* (citing *Cook v. Iowa Dept. of Job Service*, 299 N.W.2d 698, 701 (Iowa 1980)).

"Good cause" for leaving employment must be that which is reasonable to the average person, not to the overly sensitive individual or the claimant in particular. *Uniweld Products v. Industrial Relations Commission*, 277 S.2d 827 (Florida App. 1973). While a notice of intent to quit is not required to obtain unemployment benefits where the claimant quits due to intolerable or

detrimental working conditions, the case for good cause is stronger where the employee complains, asks for correction or accommodation, and employer fails to respond. *Hy-Vee Inc. v. EAB*, 710 N.W.2d 1 (Iowa 2005).

Iowa unemployment insurance law disqualifies claimants who voluntarily quit employment without good cause attributable to the employer or who are discharged for work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code §§ 96.5(1) and 96.5(2)a. A voluntary quitting of employment requires that an employee exercise a voluntary choice between remaining employed or terminating the employment relationship. *Wills v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 447 N.W.2d 137, 138 (Iowa 1989); *Peck v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 492 N.W.2d 438, 440 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992). A voluntary leaving of employment requires an intention to terminate the employment relationship accompanied by an overt act of carrying out that intention. *Local Lodge #1426 v. Wilson Trailer*, 289 N.W.2d 608, 612 (Iowa 1980).

Employer has carried its burden of proving claimant's departure from employment was voluntary. However, claimant has not carried her burden of proving the voluntary leaving was for good cause attributable to employer. Claimant abandoned her job by deciding not to return to work or provide a doctor's note as directed. Claimant quit because she believed she was going to be discharged. Importantly, claimant was not actually told she was going to be discharged. Furthermore, the administrative law judge does not find claimant's belief that she would be discharged to be reasonable. It makes little sense that employer would request a doctor's note and give claimant time to provide one, only to then discharge her regardless of whether or not she provided one.

Because claimant's quitting was without good cause attributable to employer, benefits are denied.

- II. Was the claimant overpaid benefits? Should claimant repay benefits and/or charge employer due to employer participation in fact finding?

Iowa Code section 96.3(7) provides, in pertinent part:

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) (a) 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.

(b) 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.

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 unrebutted 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.

The unemployment insurance system shows claimant has received weekly benefits in the amount of \$220.00 for a total of 14 weeks, from the benefit week ending May 9, 2020 and continuing through the benefit week ending August 8, 2020. The total amount of benefits paid to date is \$3,080.00. Because the administrative law judge now finds claimant's separation from employment was disqualifying, she has been overpaid benefits in that amount.

Employer participated in the fact-finding interview by providing written documentation in response to a request for information from an IWD representative. Because employer did participate in the fact-finding interview within the meaning of Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10, benefits shall be recovered from claimant. 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.

III. Is the claimant eligible for federal pandemic unemployment compensation?

PL116-136, Sec. 2104 provides, in pertinent part:

(b) Provisions of Agreement

(1) Federal pandemic unemployment compensation.--Any agreement under this section shall provide that the State agency of the State will make payments of regular compensation to individuals in amounts and to the extent that they would be determined if the State law of the State were applied, with respect to any week for which the individual is (disregarding this section) otherwise entitled under the State law to receive regular compensation, as if such State law had been modified in a manner such that the amount of regular compensation (including dependents' allowances) payable for any week shall be equal to

(A) the amount determined under the State law (before the application of this paragraph), plus

(B) an additional amount of \$600 (in this section referred to as "Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation").

....

(f) Fraud and Overpayments

(2) Repayment.--In the case of individuals who have received amounts of Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation to which they were not entitled, the State shall require such individuals to repay the amounts of such Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation to the State agency...

Because the claimant is disqualified from receiving regular unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, she is also disqualified from receiving FPUC. Claimant has therefore been overpaid FPUC in the amount of \$7,200.00. Claimant is required to repay that amount.

DECISION:

The July 7, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits is REVERSED. Claimant is disqualified from benefits from the date of separation and until she earns wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount.

Claimant has been overpaid benefits in the amount of \$3,080.00. Benefits shall be recovered from claimant. 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.

Claimant has been overpaid FPUC in the amount of \$7,200.00. Claimant is required to repay that amount.



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

August 24, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

abd/sam

Note to Claimant:

If you disagree with this decision, you may file an appeal with the Employment Appeal Board by following the instructions on the first page of this decision. If this decision denies benefits, you may be responsible for paying back benefits already received.

Individuals who are disqualified from or are otherwise ineligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits but who are currently unemployed for reasons related to COVID-19 may qualify for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). **You will need to apply for PUA to determine your eligibility.** Additional information on how to apply for PUA can be found at <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/pua-information>.