

**IN THE IOWA ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS DIVISION
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

JOSHUA WILLIAMS
Claimant

CASEY'S MARKETING COMPANY
Employer

APPEAL 23A-UI-08858-DZ-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 08/27/23
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Joshua Williams, the claimant/appellant,¹ appealed the Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) September 13, 2023 (reference 01) unemployment insurance (UI) decision. IWD found Mr. Williams not eligible for REGULAR (state) UI benefits because IWD concluded the employer discharged him from work on August 25, 2023 for not following instructions. On September 19, 2023 the Iowa Department of Inspections, Appeals, and Licensing (DIAL), UI Appeals Bureau mailed a notice of hearing to Mr. Williams and the employer for a telephone hearing scheduled for October 2, 2023.

The undersigned administrative law judge held a telephone hearing on October 2, 2023. Mr. Williams participated in the hearing personally. The employer did not participate in the hearing. The undersigned admitted Claimant's Exhibit A as evidence.

ISSUE:

Did the employer discharge Mr. Williams from employment for disqualifying, job-related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Mr. Williams began working for the employer in 2017. He worked as a full-time general laborer. His employment ended on August 25, 2023.

On, or about, August 16, 2023, Mr. Williams went to the employer provided daycare to pick up his child. Mr. Williams was off the clock at this time. Mr. Williams' child's previous teacher told Mr. Williams that they missed having Mr. Williams' child as a student. Mr. Williams patted the teacher's shoulder and said his child missed having them as a teacher. The next day or so, the daycare manager told Mr. Williams that the teacher had reported the incident to the daycare manager. Mr. Williams apologized and stated that he did not intend to make the teacher feel uncomfortable and he did not intend his shoulder pat to be flirty or unprofessional. The daycare manager told Mr. Williams that things were okay, but Mr. Williams did not need to say anything

¹ Claimant is the person who applied for UI benefits. Appellant is the person or employer who appealed.

to the teacher going forward. Mr. Williams agreed and figured this would not be an issues since his child was no longer in the teacher's classroom.

On August 23, Mr. Williams was leaving the daycare with his son. Mr. Williams was off the clock at this time. The teacher was also leaving with her child. The teacher's child's blanket fell to the floor in the doorway. Mr. Williams picked up the blanket, handed it to the teacher, said "I'm sorry for everything" and continued to leave. The next day, the employer called Mr. Williams into the office and told him that they were opening an investigation because Mr. Williams spoke to the teacher after the employer told him not to do so. The following day, August 25, the employer terminated Mr. Williams for violating the employer's harassment and discrimination policy. Mr. Williams had no prior disciplinary record.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the undersigned concludes the employer discharged Mr. Williams from employment for a reason that does not disqualify him from receiving UI benefits.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)(a) and (d) provide, in relevant part:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

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 individual shall be disqualified for benefits 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.

d. For the purposes of this subsection, "misconduct" means a deliberate act or omission by an employee that constitutes a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of the employee's contract of employment. Misconduct is 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(4) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and employer's statement must give detailed facts as to the specific reason for the claimant's discharge. 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. In cases where a suspension or disciplinary layoff exists, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct shall be resolved.

The employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct.² The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating the claimant from employment, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits.³ Misconduct must be “substantial” to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits.⁴

In an at-will employment environment an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job related misconduct as the reason for the separation, it incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. A determination as to whether an employee’s act is misconduct does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer’s policy or rule. A violation of the employer’s policy or rule is not necessarily disqualifying misconduct even if the employer was fully within its rights to impose discipline up to or including discharge for the incident under its policy.

In this case, the evidence establishes that the employer ended Mr. Williams’ employment for talking to the teacher when he was not at work. The employer did not participate in the hearing to explain how or why Mr. Williams talking to the teacher was misconduct. Since the employer had not established disqualifying-job-related misconduct, Mr. Williams is eligible for UI benefits as long as no other decision denies him UI benefits.

DECISION:

The September 13, 2023 (reference 01) UI decision is REVERSED. The employer discharged Mr. Williams from employment for a reason that does not disqualify him from receiving UI benefits. Mr. Williams is eligible for UI benefits, as long as no other decision denies him UI benefits. Any benefits Mr. Williams claimed and IWD withheld on this basis must be paid.



Daniel Zeno
Administrative Law Judge

October 3, 2023
Decision Dated and Mailed

DZ/jkb

² *Cosper v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

³ *Infante v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984).

⁴ *Newman v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984).

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
4th 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> or by contacting the District Court Clerk of Court <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

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 adquiera firmeza. Puede encontrar información adicional sobre cómo presentar una petición en el Código de Iowa §17A.19, que se encuentra en línea en <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf> o comunicándose con el Tribunal de Distrito Secretario del tribunal <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

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.