

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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**KRISTI K RUTHERFORD**  
Claimant

**APPEAL 20A-UI-07175-AW-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**CASEY'S MARKETING COMPANY**  
Employer

**OC: 04/19/20**  
**Claimant: Respondent (2)**

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Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct  
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer/Representative Participation Fact-finding Interview  
PL 116-136, Sec. 2104 – Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Employer filed an appeal from the June 19, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on August 5, 2020, at 9:00 a.m. Claimant participated. Employer participated through Rebecca Buckles, Store Manager. Employer's Exhibits 1 – 5 were admitted. Official notice was taken of the administrative record.

**ISSUES:**

Whether claimant's separation was a discharge for disqualifying job-related misconduct.  
Whether claimant was overpaid benefits.  
Whether claimant should repay those benefits and/or whether employer should be charged based upon its participation in the fact-finding interview.  
Whether claimant is eligible for Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation.

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed as a part-time store employee from August 10, 2019 until her employment with Casey's ended on April 24, 2020. Claimant's direct supervisor was Rebecca Buckles, Store Manager.

On April 15, 2020, Buckles received a report that the store was closed during the middle of the day. Buckles sent an assistant manager to the store to check. The store was open and busy with customers. Claimant became upset that someone would lie about the store being closed and believed someone made the false complaint to put claimant's job in jeopardy. Claimant called Buckles who was at home. Claimant screamed at Buckle and used profanity. Claimant demanded the customer's name that complained and stated she is tired of people trying to get her fired. Claimant also stated that she hates "this place." Claimant hung up on Buckle and threw the telephone onto the desk in the office. Employer does not recall exactly what claimant

said that was profane and chose not to quote claimant's profanity in the Corrective Action Statement. (Exhibit 2) There were other employees and a customer present to observe claimant's behavior. Claimant had prior warnings for a variety of offenses, but had no prior warnings for using profanity, yelling at her direct supervisor, throwing items, or being unprofessional or disrespectful. On April 24, 2020, employer discharged claimant for her actions on April 15, 2020.

The administrative record reflects that claimant filed for and has received regular unemployment insurance (UI) benefits in the gross amount of \$3,654.00 for the 14-week period between April 19, 2020 and July 25, 2020. In addition to regular unemployment insurance benefits, claimant also received Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) in the gross amount of \$8,400.00 for the 14-week period between April 19, 2020 and July 25, 2020. Employer provided a written statement for the fact-finding interview. The written statement did not include any details about the incident that led to claimant's discharge. Employer did not provide the name and contact information of a witness with first-hand information for rebuttal purposes.

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

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct. Benefits are denied.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)(a) provides:

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 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(1)(a) provides:

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 of misconduct has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Reigelsberger v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 500 N.W.2d 64, 66 (Iowa 1993); *accord Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000). Further, the employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

“The use of profanity or offensive language in a confrontational, disrespectful, or name-calling context, may be recognized as misconduct, even in the case of isolated incidents or situations in which the target of abusive name-calling is not present when the vulgar statements are initially made. The question of whether the use of improper language in the workplace is misconduct is nearly always a fact question. It must be considered with other relevant factors, including the context in which it is said, and the general work environment.” *Myers v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 462 N.W.2d 734 (Iowa Ct. App. 1990). Vulgar language in front of customers can constitute misconduct, *Zeches v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 333 N.W.2d 735, 736 (Iowa Ct. App. 1983), as well as vulgarities accompanied with a refusal to obey supervisors. *Warrell v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 356 N.W.2d 587, 589 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984).

Claimant yelled profanity in a confrontational and disrespectful context towards her direct supervisor in the presence of a customer and coworkers. Claimant’s actions were a deliberate violation or disregard of standards of behavior employer had a right to expect of claimant and constitute misconduct even without a prior warning. Claimant was discharged for a current act of disqualifying work-related misconduct. Benefits are denied.

The next issues to be determined are whether claimant has been overpaid benefits, whether the claimant must repay those benefits, and whether employer’s account will be charged. For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes that claimant was overpaid UI, that claimant is not required to repay UI because employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview and that employer’s account shall be charged for UI paid to claimant.

Iowa Code § 96.3(7)(a)-(b) provides:

*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. The employer shall not be relieved of charges if benefits are paid because the employer or an agent of the employer failed to respond timely or adequately to the department’s request for information relating to the payment of benefits. This prohibition against relief of charges shall apply to both contributory and reimbursable employers.

(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.

(2) An accounting firm, agent, unemployment insurance accounting firm, or other entity that represents an employer in unemployment claim matters and demonstrates a continuous pattern of failing to participate in the initial determinations to award benefits, as determined and defined by rule by the department, shall be denied permission by the department to represent any employers in unemployment insurance matters. This

subparagraph does not apply to attorneys or counselors admitted to practice in the courts of this state pursuant to section 602.10101.

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.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. However, the overpayment will not be recovered when it is based on a reversal on appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant's employment separation if: (1) the benefits were not received due to any fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant and (2) the employer did not participate in the initial proceeding to award benefits. The employer will not be charged for benefits if it is determined that they did participate in the fact-finding interview. Iowa Code § 96.3(7), Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10.

Because claimant's separation was disqualifying, UI was paid to which claimant was not entitled. Claimant has been overpaid UI in the gross amount of \$3,654.00 for the 14-week period between April 19, 2020 and July 25, 2020. Employer did not provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation or the name and contact information of a witness with first-hand knowledge of the events. Because employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview, claimant is not required to repay UI to the agency; employer's account shall be charged for UI paid to claimant.

The next issues to be determined are whether claimant was eligible for FPUC and whether claimant has been overpaid FPUC. For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was not eligible for FPUC and was overpaid FPUC, which must be repaid.

PL 116-136, 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 claimant is disqualified from receiving UI, claimant is also disqualified from receiving FPUC. While Iowa law does not require a claimant to repay regular unemployment insurance benefits when the employer does not participate in the fact-finding interview, the CARES Act

makes no such exception for the repayment of FPUC. Therefore, the determination of whether the claimant must repay FPUC does not hinge on the employer's participation in the fact-finding interview. The administrative law judge concludes that claimant has been overpaid FPUC in the gross amount of \$8,400.00 for the 14-week period between April 19, 2020 and July 25, 2020. Claimant must repay these benefits.

**NOTE TO CLAIMANT:** This decision determines you are not eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits. If you disagree with this decision you may file an appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by following the instructions on the first page of this decision. Individuals who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits due to disqualifying separations, 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 under the program.** Additional information on how to apply for PUA can be found at <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/pua-information>. If this decision becomes final or if you are not eligible for PUA, you may have an overpayment of benefits.

**DECISION:**

The June 19, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct. Benefits are denied until claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible. Claimant has been overpaid regular unemployment insurance but is not required to repay those benefits because employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview. Employer's account shall be charged for regular unemployment insurance benefits. Claimant has been overpaid Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation in the gross amount of \$8,400.00 for the 14-week period between April 19, 2020 and July 25, 2020, which must be repaid.



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August 12, 2020  
Decision Dated and Mailed

acw/mh