

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

MAYA D LIAS
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 16A-UI-04508-TN

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

HELPING HANDS NURSING SOLUTIONS
Employer

OC: 03/13/16
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Section 96.5(2)a – Discharge
Section 96.3(7) – Benefit Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Helping Hands Nursing Solutions filed a timely appeal from a representative's decision dated April 15, 2016 (reference 03) which held claimant eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice was provided, an in-person hearing was held in Sioux City, Iowa on May 10, 2016. Although duly notified, the claimant did not participate. The employer participated by Ms. Maria Hernandez, Recruiter/Manager.

ISSUE:

At issue is whether the claimant was discharged for a current act of misconduct sufficient to warrant the denial of unemployment insurance benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having considered all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Maya Lias was employed by Helping Hands Nursing Solutions from December 29, 2015 until March 10, 2016, when she was discharged by the employer. Ms. Lias worked as a full-time direct care provider and was assigned by the medical staffing firm to work at the Pride Group Mental Health Facility located in LeMars, Iowa. Ms. Lias' employment with Helping Hands Nursing Solutions came to an end on March 10, 2016, when she was discharged from employment because of repeated violations of both the policies of the Pride Group Mental Health Facility and Helping Hands Nursing Solutions.

The event that triggered Ms. Lias' discharge from employment on March 10, 2016 took place on the same date, when the claimant violated Pride Group Mental Health Facility rules. On that day, the claimant brought hair coloring solution to the facility without the knowledge or authorization of either her employer or the Pride Group staff. The claimant then further violated the employer's expectations by bleaching a mental health resident's hair "blue." Ms. Lias had previously been warned not to provide, sell, or barter any items with residents. The claimant had not received authorization to color the resident's hair and the claimant was aware that the resident was incapable of making rational decisions, and that approval needed to first be obtained from care staff members.

Because the claimant had been specifically warned in the past for similar conduct, when she provided “e-cigarettes items” to a resident without authorization, a decision was made to terminate Ms. Lias from her employment.

After the claimant was discharged, the employer found additional violations and also concluded after the fact that Ms. Lias had misreported her work time.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The question before the administrative law judge is whether the evidence in the record establishes a current act of misconduct sufficient to warrant the denial of unemployment insurance benefits. It does.

Iowa Code § 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 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(1)a provides:

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 has the burden of proof in establishing job disqualifying misconduct. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). Misconduct must be substantial in order to justify a denial of unemployment benefits. Misconduct serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee, may not necessarily be serious enough to warrant a denial of

unemployment benefits. See Lee v. Employment Appeal Board, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. See Gimbel v. Employment Appeal Board, 489 N.W.2d 36, 39 (Iowa Ct. of Appeals 1992).

In the case at hand, Ms. Lias was aware that she could not give, sell, barter, or exchange any items with a patient/resident of the mental health facility where she was assigned to work for Helping Hands Nursing Solutions. The claimant had been specifically warned about the issue.

Despite of being aware of the rule and having been warned, Ms. Lias nevertheless brought hair dye to the mental health facility where she was assigned to work; for the purpose of administering the solution to a resident without the knowledge or approval of staff members at the mental health facility. The claimant knew or should have known that the resident was not authorized to make decisions for herself.

Because the claimant had been specifically warned a short time before for the same type of behavior, a decision was made to terminate Ms. Lias from her employment on the same date as the final incident had taken place.

The administrative law judge finds, based upon the evidence in the record, that the employer has established disqualifying conduct on the part of the claimant and that the claimant was discharged for a current act of misconduct. Accordingly the claimant is disqualified from unemployment insurance benefits until she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, and she is otherwise eligible.

Because the claimant was deemed ineligible for benefits, any benefits the claimant could receive could be constituted an overpayment of unemployment insurance benefits. The administrative record reflects that the claimant has received unemployment benefits in the amount of \$744.00 since filing a claim with an effective date of March 13, 2016, for the week ending dates of March 19, 2016 through April 23, 2016. The administrative record also establishes that the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview or make a first-hand witness available for rebuttal.

Iowa Code § 96.3-7, as amended in 2008, 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) 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. 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. The employer shall not be charged with the benefits.

(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.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)"b" as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which she was not entitled. The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for those 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 upon a reversal of appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant's employment separation if: 1) benefits were not received due to any willful wrongdoing or 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 Section 96.3(7). In this case, the claimant received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. Since the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview, the claimant is obligated to repay to the Agency the benefits that she received and the employer's account shall not be charged.

DECISION:

The representative's decision dated April 15, 2016 (reference 03) is reversed. The claimant was discharged for misconduct. Unemployment insurance benefits are withheld until the claimant has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, and she is otherwise eligible. The claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$744.00 and is liable to repay this amount. The employer's account shall not be charged because the employer participated in the fact-finding interview.

Terence P. Nice
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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