

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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**MICHAEL SIMPSON**  
Claimant

**YRC INC**  
Employer

**APPEAL 21A-UI-00107-JC-T**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 03/22/20**  
**Claimant: Respondent (1)**

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Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism  
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer/Representative Participation Fact-finding Interview  
PL116-136, Sec. 2104 – Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

The employer/appellant, YRC Inc., filed an appeal from the November 23, 2020 (reference 01) Iowa Workforce Development (“IWD”) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on February 3, 2021. The claimant, Michael Simpson, participated. The employer participated through Jennifer Porter.

The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative records. Employer Exhibit 1 was admitted. Based on the evidence, the arguments presented, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

**ISSUES:**

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?  
Has the claimant been overpaid any unemployment insurance benefits, and if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the agency be waived?  
Can any charges to the employer’s account be waived?  
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: The claimant was employed full-time as a customer service representative and was separated from employment on September 30, 2020, when he was discharged for excessive absences, which caused him to “point out”.

When claimant was hired in 2015, he was trained on the employer’s attendance policy. (Employer Exhibit 1). Employer uses a point based attendance policy which issues point values

to attendance infractions. Upon receipt of 54 points in a rolling calendar year, an employee is subject to discharge. Employees must call the attendance line 30 minutes prior to shift in order for absence to be properly reported.

The employer updated its policy in July 2020 and claimant was trained in a July 1, 2020 staff meeting. Employer's policy is a "no fault" policy which generally does not take into consideration the reason an employee is absent or late when determining whether to issue points infractions. Employer stated it amended its policy to allow absences related to COVID-19 to be waived when employees reported the absence.

Claimant was issued a documented verbal warning on September 21, 2020 for having 42 points. He was issued a written warning on September 24, 2020 for having 48 points. (Employer Exhibit 1.) Employer does document the reasons for infractions/absences. Claimant stated prior to September 26, 2020, he had been absent due to lack of childcare, illness, traffic, and medical issues.

The final absence occurred on September 26, 2020. Claimant properly reported the absence by calling the attendance line. Claimant reported he would be absent due to illness and because he had to pick up his child from school due to a COVID-19 incident. Employer stated it didn't know that claimant's absence was due to COVID-19. Claimant told his manager that it was due to COVID-19. Claimant was subsequently discharged.

The administrative record reflects that claimant has received unemployment benefits and FPUC benefits. The employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview.

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

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed.

Iowa unemployment insurance law disqualifies individuals who are discharged from employment for misconduct from receiving unemployment insurance benefits. Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a. They remain disqualified until such time as they requalify for benefits by working and earning insured wages ten times their weekly benefit amount. *Id.*

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 disqualifying job misconduct. Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). Absences due to illness or injury must be properly reported in order to be excused. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

In the specific context of absenteeism the administrative code provides:

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) provides:

(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

871 IAC 24.32(7); See *Higgins v. IDJS*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190 n. 1 (Iowa 1984) (“rule [2]4.32(7)...accurately states the law”).

In order to show misconduct due to absenteeism, the employer must establish the claimant had excessive absences that were unexcused. Thus, the first step in the analysis is to determine whether the absences were unexcused. The requirement of “unexcused” can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for “reasonable grounds,” *Higgins* at 191, or because it was not “properly reported,” holding excused absences are those “with appropriate notice.” *Cosper* at 10. Absences due to properly reported illness are excused, even if the employer was fully within its rights to assess points or impose discipline up to or including discharge for the absence under its attendance policy. *Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7)*; *Cosper, supra*.

The second step in the analysis is to determine whether the unexcused absences were excessive. Excessive absenteeism has been found when there has been seven unexcused absences in five months; five unexcused absences and three instances of tardiness in eight months; three unexcused absences over an eight-month period; three unexcused absences over seven months; and missing three times after being warned. *Higgins*, 350 N.W.2d at 192 (Iowa 1984); *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984); *Armel v. EAB*, 2007 WL 3376929\*3 (Iowa App. Nov. 15, 2007); *Hiland v. EAB*, No. 12-2300 (Iowa App. July 10, 2013); and *Clark v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 317 N.W.2d 517 (Iowa App. 1982). Excessiveness by its definition implies an amount or degree too great to be reasonable or acceptable.

If the employer applied its policy of not issuing points for COVID-19 related absences, claimant's absence on September 26, 2020 would be excused. The administrative law judge is persuaded claimant directly communicating to his supervisor that his absence was attributed to COVID-19 was sufficient to notify the employer of the reason. Even if employer did not apply its own policy, the credible evidence presented supports claimant properly reported his absence

and it was due to illness. Therefore, the final absence was due to illness and properly reported, would be considered excused.

Iowa Admin. Code r.871-24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

Based on the evidence presented, the administrative law judge concludes the employer has not established that the claimant had excessive absences which would be considered unexcused for purposes of unemployment insurance eligibility. Because the last absence was related to properly reported illness or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct. Since the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct, and, without such, the history of other incidents need not be examined. Accordingly, benefits are allowed.

Because the claimant is eligible for benefits, the issues of overpayment of regular unemployment insurance benefits and relief of charges are moot.

Because the claimant is allowed regular unemployment insurance benefits, he is also eligible for FPUC, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer is not charged for these federal benefits. (See PL116-136, Sec. 2104).

The parties are reminded that under Iowa Code § 96.6-4, a finding of fact or law, judgment, conclusion, or final order made in an unemployment insurance proceeding is binding only on the parties in this proceeding and is not binding in any other agency or judicial proceeding. This provision makes clear that unemployment findings and conclusions are only binding on unemployment issues, and have no effect otherwise.

**DECISION:**

The November 17, 2020, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided he is otherwise eligible. He is not overpaid benefits. The employer's account cannot be relieved of charges associated with the claim for regular unemployment insurance benefits. The claimant is also eligible for FPUC, provided he is otherwise eligible.



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Jennifer L. Beckman  
Administrative Law Judge

February 16, 2021  
Decision Dated and Mailed

jlb/ol