

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

CASANDRA L TURMAN
Claimant

APPEAL 16A-UI-04795-DGT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

CAR-FRESHNER CORPORATION
Employer

**OC: 04/03/16
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.4(3) – Ability to and Availability for Work
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(1) – Able to Work - illness, injury or pregnancy
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.23(35) – Availability Disqualifications

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated April 22, 2016, (reference 01) that held claimant was not eligible for benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on May 10, 2016. Claimant participated personally. Employer participated by Chris Walters, Human Resources Manager.

ISSUE:

The issue in this matter is whether claimant is able and available for work.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant received an injury while she was not at work on or about January 8, 2016. Claimant went to the doctor and found that her foot had been broken in four places.

Claimant was placed on a voluntary medical leave beginning on or about January 8, 2016. Claimant was given work restrictions by her doctor which included her staying off her foot while working. Employer did not have any work available for claimant with those work restrictions at that time.

On or about January 21, 2016 claimant was notified that her work restrictions would be in place for at least two more months while her foot was healing. Employer was not able to accommodate her medical restrictions at that time, and decided to terminate her employment.

Claimant was later released back to work without restrictions on March 25, 2016. She is able to work, and is earnestly seeking work at this time.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes that the claimant is able to work and available for work effective April 3, 2016.

Iowa Code § 96.4-3 provides:

An unemployed individual shall be eligible to receive benefits with respect to any week only if the department finds that:

3. The individual is able to work, is available for work, and is earnestly and actively seeking work. This subsection is waived if the individual is deemed partially unemployed, while employed at the individual's regular job, as defined in section 96.19, subsection 38, paragraph "b", unnumbered paragraph 1, or temporarily unemployed as defined in section 96.19, subsection 38, paragraph "c". The work search requirements of this subsection and the disqualification requirement for failure to apply for, or to accept suitable work of section 96.5, subsection 3 are waived if the individual is not disqualified for benefits under section 96.5, subsection 1, paragraph "h".

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(1)a provides:

Benefits eligibility conditions. For an individual to be eligible to receive benefits the department must find that the individual is able to work, available for work, and earnestly and actively seeking work. The individual bears the burden of establishing that the individual is able to work, available for work, and earnestly and actively seeking work.

(1) Able to work. An individual must be physically and mentally able to work in some gainful employment, not necessarily in the individual's customary occupation, but which is engaged in by others as a means of livelihood.

a. Illness, injury or pregnancy. Each case is decided upon an individual basis, recognizing that various work opportunities present different physical requirements. A statement from a medical practitioner is considered prima facie evidence of the physical ability of the individual to perform the work required. A pregnant individual must meet the same criteria for determining ableness as do all other individuals.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.23(35) provides:

Availability disqualifications. The following are reasons for a claimant being disqualified for being unavailable for work.

(35) Where the claimant is not able to work and is under the care of a physician and has not been released as being able to work.

To be able to work, "[a]n individual must be physically and mentally able to work in some gainful employment, not necessarily in the individual's customary occupation, but which is engaged in by others as a means of livelihood." *Sierra v. Employment Appeal Board*, 508 N.W.2d 719, 721 (Iowa 1993); *Geiken v. Lutheran Home for the Aged*, 468 N.W.2d 223 (Iowa 1991); Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.22(1). "An evaluation of an individual's ability to work for the purposes of determining that individual's eligibility for unemployment benefits must necessarily take into consideration the economic and legal forces at work in the general labor market in which the individual resides." *Sierra* at 723. The court in *Gilmore v. Empl. Appeal Bd.*, 695 N.W.2d 44 (Iowa Ct. App. 2004) noted that "[i]nsofar as the Employment Security Law is not designed to provide health and disability insurance, only those employees who experience illness-induced separations that can fairly be attributed to the employer are properly eligible for unemployment benefits." *White v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 487 N.W.2d 342, 345 (Iowa 1992) (citing *Butts v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 328 N.W.2d 515, 517 (Iowa 1983)).

Subsection d of Iowa Code § 96.5(1) provides an exception where:

The individual left employment because of illness, injury or pregnancy upon the advice of a licensed and practicing physician, and upon knowledge of the necessity for absence immediately notified the employer, or the employer consented to the absence, and after recovering from the illness, injury or pregnancy, when recovery was certified by a licensed and practicing physician, the individual returned to the employer and offered to perform services and ... the individual's regular work or comparable suitable work was not available, if so found by the department, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

The statute specifically requires that the employee has recovered from the illness or injury, and this recovery has been certified by a physician. The exception in section 96.5(1)(d) only applies when an employee is *fully* recovered and the employer has not held open the employee's position. *White*, 487 N.W.2d at 346; *Hedges v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 368 N.W.2d 862, 867 (Iowa Ct. App. 1985); see also *Geiken v. Lutheran Home for the Aged Ass'n.*, 468 N.W.2d 223, 226 (Iowa 1991) (noting the full recovery standard of section 96.5(1)(d)).

The Court found no separation from employment and allowed partial benefits where claimant's work aggravated chronic lung disease prevented him from full-duty work but he reported daily for assignments as available. *FDL Foods v. Emp't Appeal Bd. and Lambers*, 460 N.W.2d 885 (Iowa Ct. App. 1990).

Inasmuch as the medical condition was not work-related and the treating physician has released the claimant to return to work, she has established her ability to work.

Since the employment ended on January 21, 2016, claimant is no longer obligated to return to employer upon her medical release to offer her services. At that point, her ability to work is not measured by the job she held most recently, but by standards of her education, training, and work history. Since she has performed sedentary jobs within the work history, she is considered able to work even if she cannot yet return to a job as most recently performed for the employer. Thus the claimant is considered as able to work as of April 3, 2016.

Claimant is on notice that she must conduct at least two work searches per week and file weekly claims in order to retain eligibility for benefits.

DECISION:

The April 22, 2016, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. The claimant is able to work and available for work effective April 3, 2016. Benefits are allowed, provided she is otherwise eligible.

Duane L. Golden
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dlg/pjs

