

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

TORI A WALTERS

Claimant

APPEAL 19A-UI-07787-SC-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

EAGLE WINDOW & DOOR

MANUFACTURING

Employer

OC: 03/31/19

Claimant: Respondent (2)

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

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

On October 4, 2019, Eagle Window & Door Manufacturing (employer) filed an appeal from the September 25, 2019, reference 01, unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits based upon the determination Tori A. Walters (claimant) was not discharged for willful or deliberate misconduct. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on October 24, 2019. The claimant did not respond to the hearing notice and did not participate. The employer participated through HR Business Partner Valerie Parr and was represented by Thomas Kuiper. Manager William Lynch was sworn in as a witness for the employer but did not testify. The Employer's Exhibit 1 was admitted into the record. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative record, including the fact-finding documents and the claimant's claim history.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

Has the claimant been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits and, if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the agency be waived?

Can charges to the employer's account be waived?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed full-time as an Assembler beginning on July 7, 2017, and was separated from employment on September 12, 2019, when she was discharged. The employer has an anti-harassment policy and the claimant received a copy of that policy.

On August 23, 2019, the employer received a report from an employee that the claimant was talking about being a pimp at work. The claimant had shown a photo of an 18-year-old woman from Cedar Rapids who lived with her and her significant other. The young woman was wearing red lingerie and posed provocatively. The claimant asked other employees if they wanted to

have sex with the young woman in exchange for money. The employer contacted local law enforcement who told them to hold off on investigating the situation until they gave them permission.

On September 5, law enforcement contacted the employer and cleared them to conduct an investigation. The following day, HR Business Partner Valerie Parr and Manager William Lynch interviewed two other employees who confirmed they had also been subjected to the behavior described by the first employee. They also interviewed the claimant who denied making the comments alleged but stated she had been talking about her sister's arrest a couple of weeks before for human trafficking and prostitution. The employer determined the claimant had violated its sexual harassment policy and discharged her on September 12.

The administrative record reflects that claimant has received unemployment benefits in the amount of \$2,382.00, since filing an additional claim with an effective date of September 8, 2019, for the six weeks ending October 19, 2019. The employer provided documentation for the fact-finding interview including a SIDES protest indicating the date and reason the claimant was discharged as well as a copy of the employer's anti-harassment policy. The only phone number provided by the employer to the fact-finder was the third party's State Agency Response Center at 800-829-1510. The fact-finder called that number and spoke to UI Claims Specialist Kelly who instructed her to use the written documents. Kelly also provided a phone number for Parr; however, the last digit was wrong and the fact-finder was unable to reach Parr.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

1. Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct. Benefits are denied.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits:

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:

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. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating the claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). Misconduct must be "substantial" to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. *Newman v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). Negligence does not constitute misconduct unless recurrent in nature; a single act is not disqualifying unless indicative of a deliberate disregard of the employer's interests. *Henry v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 391 N.W.2d 731 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986).

The employer has an interest in providing its employees with a harassment-free workplace. It has established rules and disciplinary procedures to ensure that its interests are being protected. The claimant harassed other co-workers in violation of the employer's policy when she solicited sex with her tenant for money and showed a picture of a provocatively posed woman in lingerie at work. The claimant's conduct was a deliberate violation of the reasonable conduct an employer has a right to expect of an employee. The claimant's conduct is disqualifying even without prior warning. Benefits are denied.

II. Has the claimant been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits and, if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the agency be waived and the employer's account charged?

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge finds the claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits and the employer participated in the fact-finding interview. Therefore, the claimant is obligated to repay the benefits received and the employer's account shall not be charged.

Iowa Code section 96.3(7)a, b, as amended in 2008, provides:

Payment – determination – duration – child support intercept.

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(1) 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 un rebutted 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.

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 benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. Iowa Code § 96.7. 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. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10(1). 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.

In this case, the claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. The employer failed to provide live testimony for the fact-finding interview but attempted to provide the name and phone number of a first-hand witness. Additionally, it submitted documentation that described the specific circumstances leading to the claimant's separation and a copy of the policy the claimant violated. The employer is deemed to have participated through the documents provided. Since the employer participated in the fact-finding interview, the claimant is obligated to repay to the agency the benefits she received and the employer's account shall not be charged.

DECISION:

The September 25, 2019, reference 01, unemployment insurance decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct. Benefits are withheld until such time as she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible.

The claimant has been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$2,382.00 and is obligated to repay the agency those benefits. The employer participated in the fact-finding interview and its account shall not be charged.

Stephanie R. Callahan
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

src/scn