



APPEAL TRIBUNAL DECISION

Docket number: 24 0887 **Hearing date:** January 14, 2024

CLAIMANT:

RICKIE ROME
[REDACTED]

EMPLOYER:

PACIFIC SEAFOOD-SEWARD LLC
[REDACTED]

CLAIMANT APPEARANCES:

Rickie Rome

EMPLOYER APPEARANCES:

Amy Kimkirk

CASE HISTORY

The claimant timely appealed a November 27, 2024 determination that denied benefits under Alaska Statute 23.20.379. The issue before the Appeal Tribunal is whether the claimant voluntarily quit suitable work without good cause or was discharged for misconduct connected with the work.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The claimant began work for the employer on July 19, 2024. He last worked on October 22, 2024. At that time, he worked varied hours as a seasonal seafood processor.

On the claimant's last day of work, he asked his foreman if he could take a layoff and the foreman told him to go ahead. The processing season was winding down and the claimant felt that he was not getting sufficient hours to continue working so he decided to quit to look for other work. Documents in the record show the claimant worked eight hours each of last three days that he worked.

The claimant held that his decision to stop working was influenced by the fact that about a month before he had moved from the employer's bunk house to a residence about 5-6 miles away and he did not have a working car, so he had to hitchhike to work.

The employer's representative held that she was told the claimant was taking a few days off to take care of personal matters. The employer did not hear from the claimant, so they considered that he had abandon the job and removed the

claimant from the payroll system on November 4, 2024. The representative held that at least some work was available to employees through December 13, 2024.

PROVISIONS OF LAW

AS 23.20.379 provides in part:

- (a) An insured worker is disqualified for waiting-week credit or benefits for the first week in which the insured worker is unemployed and for the next five weeks of unemployment following that week if the insured worker...
 - (1) left the insured worker's last suitable work voluntarily without good cause....
 - (2) was discharged for misconduct connected with the insured worker's last work.

8 AAC 85.095 provides in part:

- (c) To determine the existence of good cause under AS 23.20.379(a)(1) for voluntarily leaving work determined to be suitable under AS 23.20.385, the department will consider only the following factors:
 - (1) leaving work due to a disability or illness of the claimant that makes it impossible for the claimant to perform the duties required by the work, if the claimant has no other reasonable alternative but to leave work;
 - (2) leaving work to care for an immediate family member who has a disability or illness;
 - (3) leaving work due to safety or other working conditions or an employment agreement related directly to the work, if the claimant has no other reasonable alternative but to leave work;
 - (4) leaving work to accompany or join a spouse at a change of location, if commuting from the new location to the claimant's work is impractical; for purposes of this paragraph, the change of location must be as a result of the spouse's
 - (A) discharge from military service; or
 - (B) employment;
 - (5) leaving unskilled work to attend a vocational training or retraining course approved by the director under AS 23.20.382, only if the claimant enters the course immediately upon separating from work;

- (6) leaving work in order to protect the claimant or the claimant's immediate family members from harassment or violence;
 - (7) leaving work to accept a bonafide offer of work that offers better wages, benefits, hours, or other working conditions; if the new work does not materialize, the reasons for the work not materializing must not be due to the fault of the worker;
 - (8) other factors listed in AS 23.20.385(b).
- (d) "Misconduct connected with the insured worker's work" as used in AS 23.20.379(a)(2) means
- (1) a claimant's conduct on the job, if the conduct shows a willful and wanton disregard of the employer's interest, as a claimant might show, for example, through gross or repeated negligence, willful violation of reasonable work rules, or deliberate violation or disregard of standards of behavior that the employer has the right to expect of an employee; willful and wanton disregard of the employer's interest does not arise solely from inefficiency, unsatisfactory performance as the result of inability or incapacity, inadvertence, ordinary negligence in isolated instances, or good faith errors in judgment or discretion....

AS 23.20.385(b) provides, in part:

- (b) In determining whether work is suitable for a claimant and in determining the existence of good cause for leaving or refusing work, the department shall, in addition to determining the existence of any of the conditions specified in (a) of this section, consider the degree of risk to the claimant's health, safety, and morals, the claimant's physical fitness for the work, the claimant's prior training, experience, and earnings, the length of the claimant's unemployment, the prospects for obtaining work at the claimant's highest skill, the distance of the available work from the claimant's residence, the prospects for obtaining local work, and other factors that influence a reasonably prudent person in the claimant's circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The first matter before the Tribunal is whether the claimant voluntarily quit the work or whether he was discharged. A discharge is "a separation from work in which the employer takes the action which results in the separation, and the worker does not have the choice of remaining in employment." 8 AAC 85.010(20). Voluntary leaving means a separation from work in which the worker takes the action which results in the separation, and the worker does have the choice of

remaining in employment. Swarm, Com. Dec. 87H-UI-265, September 29, 1987. Alden, Com. Dec. 85H-UI-320, January 17, 1986.

The employer's representative provided testimony based on information she heard from another person. The claimant provided credible sworn testimony that he asked to be laid off and he did not abandon the job. The Tribunal concludes the claimant voluntarily quit suitable work, and will next consider if he had good cause to leave the work at that time.

Regulation 8 AAC 85.095(c) provides seven reasons that the Department will consider when determining good cause for voluntarily leaving work. The claimant in this matter did not leave work for one of the allowable reasons. The regulation also directs the Department to consider the suitability of the work as laid out in AS 23.20.385(b). The claimant did not establish that the work was a risk to his health, safety or morals, or that he was not physically fit for the work. This leaves the Tribunal to consider other factors that would influence a reasonably prudent person in the claimant's circumstances.

In Missall, Com. Dec. 8924740, April 17, 1990, the Commissioner of Labor summarized Department policy regarding what constitutes good cause for voluntarily leaving work. The Commissioner held, in part:

The basic definition of good cause is 'circumstances so compelling in nature as to leave the individual no reasonable alternative.' (Cite omitted.) A compelling circumstance is one 'such that the reasonable and prudent person would be justified in quitting his job under similar circumstances.' (Cite omitted). Therefore, the definition of good cause contains two elements; the reason for the quit must be compelling, and the worker must exhaust all reasonable alternatives before quitting.

The claimant left the work because he felt he was not getting enough hours, however he had worked eight hours for three consecutive days at the time he left. The claimant held the commute was difficult, however he had increased the commute himself a month earlier when he relocated from the employer's bunk house to another residence. The claimant has not established that he had a compelling reason to leave work at the time he did.

The Tribunal concludes that the claimant voluntarily left suitable work without good cause. The penalties of AS 23.20.379 are appropriate.

DECISION

The determination issued on November 27, 2024 is **AFFIRMED**. Benefits remain **DENIED** for the weeks ending November 9, 2024 through December 14, 2024. The

three weeks remain reduced from the claimant's maximum benefits. The claimant may not be eligible for extended benefits under AS 23.20.406-409.

APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is final unless an appeal is filed in writing to the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development **within 30 days** after the decision is mailed to each party. The appeal period may be extended only if the appeal is delayed for circumstances beyond the party's control. A statement of rights and procedures is enclosed.

Dated and mailed on January 17, 2025.


Rhonda Bunes, Appeals Officer