

DECISION DIGEST

Actual cases and rulings from Princeton Claims Management

MAY 2022

UI ELIGIBILITY REQUIRES A DOCTOR'S NOTE THAT THE WORK CAUSED OR AGGRAVATED A MEDICAL CONDITION

Background

A hospital patient transporter left the job voluntarily when he began to experience panic attacks and anxiety because he was fearful of contracting the Covid-19 virus. Although the working environment was overwhelming and stressful, he pushed through the obstacles and worked for more than a year under these conditions. Prior to leaving, he requested to work part-time to alleviate his stress, but no positions were available. Since his situation did not improve, he left the job to focus on his mental health.

Process

The employee (claimant) filed an unemployment claim and was held disqualified from benefits for leaving the work without good cause. The claimant disagreed and filed an appeal contending the work aggravated his medical condition, which should have established good cause for leaving work.

The claimant, an employer witness and the employer's agent (Princeton Claims Management) participated in a hearing before an Appeal Tribunal examiner. The claimant testified that he was diagnosed with a medical condition two (2) years ago, which was aggravated by the working conditions of the job due to the Covid-19 virus. Furthermore, he was experiencing panic attacks daily and was so burnt-out he had a difficult time functioning at work. He acknowledged he did not request a leave of absence, nor did he provide the employer with medical documentation substantiating that his health condition was caused or aggravated by the duties of his employment. The employer agreed that it was a difficult and stressful time for all staff but was unaware of the claimant's medical issues. The employer testified that the claimant was a good worker and continuing work was available for him, as he was not in any danger of discharge when he left.

Judgment

In the Appeal Tribunal's Decision, the examiner cites several Appellate Court decisions that require a claimant who leaves work voluntarily due to health reasons to provide unequivocal medical evidence showing the infirmity was caused or aggravated by the duties of employment. Since the claimant failed to provide such proof, his leaving was considered personal and disqualifying. Hence, the Appeal Tribunal opined that, since the claimant did not meet his burden of establishing good cause for leaving work, his disqualification from benefits would be upheld in accordance with N.J.S.A.43:21-5(a).

This case illustrates that, no matter how personally compelling an individual's reasons for leaving the job may be, if he/she does not provide unequivocal proof from a doctor that the work caused or aggravated the medical condition, he/she does not meet the burden of "good cause" for leaving and is disqualified from benefits.

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