

- DECISION -

Claimant:
BONITA S SETTERS

Decision No.: 5286-BR-10

Date: April 06, 2011

Appeal No.: 1030409

Employer:
PYSCH ASSOCIATES OF MARYLAND
LLC

S.S. No.:

L.O. No.: 60

Appellant: Employer

Issue: Whether the claimant left work voluntarily, without good cause within the meaning of Maryland Code, Labor and Employment Article, Title 8, Section 1001.

- NOTICE OF RIGHT OF APPEAL TO COURT -

You may file an appeal from this decision in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City or one of the Circuit Courts in a county in Maryland. The court rules about how to file the appeal can be found in many public libraries, in the Maryland Rules of Procedure, Title 7, Chapter 200.

The period for filing an appeal expires: May 06, 2011

REVIEW ON THE RECORD

After a review on the record, the Board of Appeals adopts the hearing examiner's finding of fact. Based on those facts, however, the Board of Appeals reverses the decision of the hearing examiner.

The General Assembly declared that, in its considered judgment, the public good and the general welfare of the citizens of the State required the enactment of the Unemployment Insurance Law, under the police powers of the State, for the compulsory setting aside of unemployment reserves to be used for the benefit of individuals unemployed through no fault of their own. *Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. Art., § 8-102(c)*. Unemployment compensation laws are to be read liberally in favor of eligibility, and disqualification provisions are to be strictly construed. *Sinai Hosp. of Baltimore v. Dept. of Empl. & Training, 309 Md. 28 (1987)*.

The Board reviews the record *de novo* and may affirm, modify, or reverse the findings of fact or conclusions of law of the hearing examiner on the basis of evidence submitted to the hearing examiner, or evidence that the Board may direct to be taken, or may remand any case to a hearing examiner for purposes it may direct. *Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. Art., § 8-510(d); COMAR 09.32.06.04(H)(1)*. The Board fully inquires into the facts of each particular case. *COMAR 09.32.06.02(E)*.

“Due to leaving work voluntarily” has a plain, definite and sensible meaning, free of ambiguity. It expresses a clear legislative intent that to disqualify a claimant from benefits, the evidence must establish that the claimant, by his or her own choice, intentionally and of his or her own free will, terminated the employment. *Allen v. Core Target Youth Program, 275 Md. 69 (1975)*. A claimant’s intent or state of mind is a factual issue for the Board of Appeals to resolve. *Dept. of Econ. & Empl. Dev. v. Taylor, 108 Md. App. 250, 274 (1996), aff’d sub. nom., 344 Md. 687 (1997)*. An intent to quit one’s job can be manifested by actions as well as words. *Lawson v. Security Fence Supply Company, 1101-BH-82*. In a case where medical problems are at issue, mere compliance with the requirement of supplying a written statement or other documentary evidence of a health problem does not mandate an automatic award of benefits. *Shifflet v. Dept. of Emp. & Training, 75 Md. App. 282 (1988)*.

There are two categories of non-disqualifying reasons for quitting employment. When a claimant voluntarily leaves work, he has the burden of proving that he left for good cause or valid circumstances based upon a preponderance of the credible evidence in the record. *Hargrove v. City of Baltimore, 2033-BH-83; Chisholm v. Johns Hopkins Hospital, 66-BR-89*.

Quitting for “good cause” is the first non-disqualifying reason. *Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. Art., § 8-1001(b)*. Purely personal reasons, no matter how compelling, cannot constitute good cause as a matter of law. *Bd. Of Educ. Of Montgomery County v. Paynter, 303 Md. 22, 28 (1985)*. An objective standard is used to determine if the average employee would have left work in that situation; in addition, a determination is made as to whether a particular employee left in good faith, and an element of good faith is whether the claimant has exhausted all reasonable alternatives before leaving work. *Board of Educ. v. Paynter, 303 Md. 22, 29-30 (1985)*(requiring a “higher standard of proof” than for good cause because reason is not job related); *also see Bohrer v. Sheetz, Inc., Law No. 13361, (Cir. Ct. for Washington Co., Apr. 24, 1984)*. “Good cause” must be job-related and it must be a cause “which would reasonably impel the average, able-bodied, qualified worker to give up his or her employment.” *Paynter, 303 Md. at 1193*. Using this definition, the Court of Appeals held that the Board correctly applied the “objective test”: “The applicable standards are the standards of reasonableness applied to the average man or woman, and not to the supersensitive.” *Paynter, 303 Md. at 1193*.

The second category or non-disqualifying reason is quitting for “valid circumstances”. *Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl. Art., § 8-1001(c)(1)*. There are three types of valid circumstances: a valid circumstance may be (1) a substantial cause that is job-related or (2) a factor that is non-job related but is “necessitous or compelling”. *Paynter 202 Md. at 30*; (3) when the claimant’s quit is caused by the individual leaving employment (i) to follow a spouse serving in the United States military or (ii) because the claimant’s spouse is a civilian employee of the military or of a federal agency involved with military operations and the spouse’s employer requires a mandatory transfer to a new location. *Md. Code Ann., Lab. & Empl.*

Art., § 8-1001(c)(1)(iii). The "necessitous or compelling" requirement relating to a cause for leaving work voluntarily does not apply to "good cause". *Board of Educ. v. Paynter*, 303 Md. 22, 30 (1985). In a case where medical problems are at issue, mere compliance with the requirement of supplying a written statement or other documentary evidence of a health problem does not mandate an automatic award of benefits. *Shifflet v. Dept. of Emp. & Training*, 75 Md. App. 282 (1988).

Section 8-1001 of the Labor and Employment Article provides that individuals shall be disqualified from the receipt of benefits where their unemployment is due to leaving work voluntarily, without good cause arising from or connected with the conditions of employment or actions of the employer or without, valid circumstances. A circumstance for voluntarily leaving work is valid if it is a substantial cause that is directly attributable to, arising from, or connected with the conditions of employment or actions of the employing unit or of such necessitous or compelling nature that the individual had no reasonable alternative other than leaving the employment.

Voluntarily quitting one's job to accept better employment cannot constitute good cause within the meaning of Section 8-1001 as a matter of law. *Total Audio - Visual v. DLLR*, 360 Md. 387, 395, 758 A.2d 124, 128 (2000)("[a] plain reading of Section 8-1001 makes clear that leaving employment for a better paying job does not constitute 'good cause'.") It may, however, constitute "valid circumstances" if it can be shown that the reasons for quitting meet the "necessitous or compelling" test of Section 8-1001(c)(ii). Section 8-1001(c)(i) is inapplicable as a matter of law in cases such as the one at bar. The Court of Appeals found, "[n]ot being directly related to, attributable to or connected with the employee's employment or the actions of that employing unit, offers of higher pay as an inducement to leave existing employment must fall, if at all into [Section 8-1001(c)(ii)]."

This is a stricter test than the "good cause" test. *Plein v. DLLR*, 369 Md. 421 (2002). Under this stricter test the Court of Appeals requires that more needs to be shown and that the precipitating event or cause "would reasonably [have] impell[ed] the average able-bodied qualified worker to give up his or her employment." *Total Audio - Visual, supra, quoting Board of Educ. of Montgomery County v. Payner*, 303 Md. 22, 29, 491 A.2d 1186, 1189-90 (1985).

The Board's current interpretation of *Total Audio - Visual*, read in conjunction with the *Plein* decision, finds that voluntarily quitting one's job for purely economic reasons is neither "necessitous" nor "compelling" under Section 8-1001. To the extent that this interpretation is inconsistent with *Gagne v. Potomac Talking Book Services, Inc.*, 374-BH-03, the Board overruled its prior precedent decision in *Gaskins v. UPS*, 1686-BR-00.

There must be a showing of something more connected with the conditions of the prior employment which motivated the claimant to quit his or her job to better employment to constitute a valid circumstance within the meaning of Section 8-1001. The Court of Appeals has stated, "Accepting more money and changing jobs is as much of a gamble and thus, as much of a personal matter as going in to business for oneself. In [the Court of Appeals'] view, it is unmistakably clear that Section 8-1001(a) was not designed to provide benefits when the precipitating cause for the voluntary leaving of employment was for higher pay or a better job. Instead, it was designed to prevent hardship to persons who lose their

job "through no fault of their own." *Plein v. DLLR*, 369 Md. 421 (2002), quoting *Total Audio – Visual*.

The Board notes that the hearing examiner did not offer or admit the *Agency Fact Finding Report* into evidence. The Board did not consider this document when rendering its decision.

The Board finds based on a preponderance of the credible evidence that the claimant did not meet her burden of demonstrating that she quit for good cause or valid circumstances within the meaning of *Maryland Annotated, Labor & Employment Article, § 8-1001*. The decision of the hearing examiner shall be reversed for the reason stated herein.

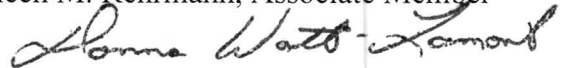
DECISION

It is held that the unemployment of the claimant was due to leaving work voluntarily, without good cause or valid circumstances, within the meaning of Maryland Code Annotated, Labor and Employment Article, Title 8, Section 1001. The claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits from the week beginning June 20, 2010 and until the claimant becomes re-employed, earns at least fifteen times their weekly benefit amount and thereafter becomes unemployed through no fault of their own.

The Hearing Examiner's decision is reversed.



Eileen M. Rehrmann, Associate Member



Donna Watts-Lamont, Chairperson

KJK

Copies mailed to:

BONITA S. SETTERS

PYSCH ASSOCIATES OF MARYLAND

ANDREW M. DANSICKER ESQ.

Susan Bass, Office of the Assistant Secretary

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS DECISION

BONITA S SETTERS

SSN #

Claimant

vs.

PYSCH ASSOCIATES OF MARYLAND
LLC

Employer/Agency

Before the:

**Maryland Department of Labor,
Licensing and Regulation
Division of Appeals**
1100 North Eutaw Street
Room 511
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 767-2421

Appeal Number: 1030409
Appellant: Claimant
Local Office : 60 / TOWSON CALL
CENTER

September 20, 2010

For the Claimant: PRESENT, ANDREW M. DANSICKER, ESQ.

For the Employer: PRESENT, BARBARA CODETT

For the Agency:

ISSUE(S)

Whether the claimant's separation from this employment was for a disqualifying reason within the meaning of the MD. Code Annotated, Labor and Employment Article, Title 8, Sections 1001 (Voluntary Quit for good cause), 1002 - 1002.1 (Gross/Aggravated Misconduct connected with the work), or 1003 (Misconduct connected with the work).

FINDINGS OF FACT

The claimant began working for this employer on or about September 3, 2007. At the time of separation, the claimant was employed as a billing manager. The claimant last worked for the employer on or about June 25, 2010, before resigning, with notice, to accept other employment. In or about early May, the claimant was informed of a significant increase in her employer-sponsored health care plan premium. This increase would have resulted in material financial hardship for the claimant's family. Shortly thereafter, the claimant (who, due to concerns about downsizing and the employer's financial health, had begun exploring other job opportunities as early as the fall of 2009), accepted a position which provided for full health care costs to be paid by the employer, as well as a substantial raise. The claimant left on good terms. Unfortunately, the employer was unable to control and/or absorb the rise in health care costs.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Md. Code Ann., Labor & Emp. Article, Section 8-1001 provides that an individual is disqualified from receiving benefits when unemployment is due to leaving work voluntarily. The Court of Appeals interpreted Section 8-1001 in Allen v. CORE Target City Youth Program, 275 Md. 69, 338 A.2d 237 (1975): "As we see it, the phrase 'leaving work voluntarily' has a plain, definite and sensible meaning...; it expresses a clear legislative intent that to disqualify a claimant from benefits, the evidence must establish that the claimant, by his or her own choice, intentionally, of his or her own free will, terminated the employment." 275 Md. at 79.

Md. Code Ann., Labor & Emp. Article, Section 8-1001 provides that an individual shall be disqualified for benefits where unemployment is due to leaving work voluntarily without good cause arising from or connected with the conditions of employment or actions of the employer, or without valid circumstances. A circumstance is valid only if it is (i) a substantial cause that is directly attributable to, arising from, or connected with conditions of employment or actions of the employing unit; or (ii) of such necessitous or compelling nature that the individual has no reasonable alternative other than leaving the employment.

In Total Audio-Visual Systems, Inc. v. DLLR, 360 Md. 387 (2000), the Court held that an individual who has left his or her employment to accept other employment has not left his or her job for good cause as defined in Section 8-1001(b)(1) of the Labor & Employment Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. This is because quitting ones job for purely economic reasons is neither necessitous nor compelling. See also Plein v. Dep't of Labor Licensing & Regulation, 369 Md. 421, 800 A.2d 757 (2002); Gagne v. Potomac Talking Book Services, Inc., 374-BH-03.

However, a finding of valid circumstances is appropriate if the claimant can show that accepting the alternative employment was "of such a necessitous and compelling nature that the individual had no reasonable alternative other than leaving the employment." Gaskins v. UPS, 1686-BR-00.

Given the high cost of medical care today, the claimant's quitting a job that offered no health benefits to accept a job that offered health benefits was both necessitous and compelling, leaving the claimant no reasonable alternative other than leaving the first employment. In such a situation, valid circumstances are warranted. Davis v. Daniel G. Schuster, LLC, 438-BH-03.

EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE

The Hearing Examiner considered all of the testimony and evidence of record in reaching this decision. Where the evidence was in conflict, the Hearing Examiner decided the Facts on the credible evidence as determined by the Hearing Examiner.

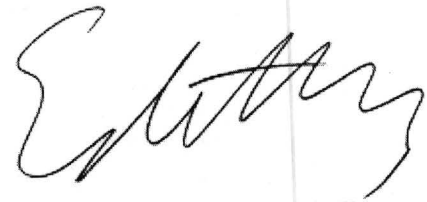
The claimant has the burden to show, by a preponderance of the credible evidence, that she resigned for reasons that constitute either good cause or valid circumstances pursuant to the Maryland Unemployment Insurance Law. Hargrove v. City of Baltimore, 2033-BH-83. Under Maryland law, voluntarily quitting one's job to accept other employment cannot be considered to be for good cause, as a matter of law. See Total Audio-Visual, *supra*. However, and pursuant to the Board's decision in Davis, *supra*, the claimant has demonstrated that her acceptance of a position offering a more affordable healthcare package was for a

necessitous and compelling reason and constitutes valid circumstances within the meaning and intent of Section 8-1001. The statute imposes a mitigated penalty. The benefit determination shall be modified accordingly.

DECISION

IT IS HELD THAT the claimant's unemployment was due to leaving work voluntarily without good cause, but with valid circumstances within the meaning of Md. Code Ann., Labor & Emp. Article, Section 8-1001. The claimant is disqualified for the week beginning June 20, 2010 and for the nine weeks immediately following. The claimant will then be eligible for benefits so long as all other eligibility requirements are met. The claimant may contact Claimant Information Service concerning the other eligibility requirements of the law at ui@dllr.state.md.us or call 410-949-0022 from the Baltimore region, or 1-800-827-4839 from outside the Baltimore area. Deaf claimants with TTY may contact Client Information Service at 410-767-2727, or outside the Baltimore area at 1-800-827-4400.

The determination of the Claims Specialist is modified.



E B Steinberg, Esq.
Hearing Examiner

Notice of Right to Request Waiver of Overpayment

The Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation may seek recovery of any overpayment received by the Claimant. Pursuant to Section 8-809 of the Labor and Employment Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, and Code of Maryland Regulations 09.32.07.01 through 09.32.07.09, the Claimant has a right to request a waiver of recovery of this overpayment. This request may be made by contacting Overpayment Recoveries Unit at 410-767-2404. If this request is made, the Claimant is entitled to a hearing on this issue.

A request for waiver of recovery of overpayment does not act as an appeal of this decision.

Esto es un documento legal importante que decide si usted recibirá los beneficios del seguro del desempleo. Si usted disiente de lo que fue decidido, usted tiene un tiempo limitado a apelar esta decisión. Si usted no entiende cómo apelar, usted puede contactar (301) 313-8000 para una explicación.

Notice of Right of Further Appeal

Any party may request a further appeal either in person, by facsimile or by mail with the Board of Appeals. Under COMAR 09.32.06.01A(1) appeals may not be filed by e-mail. Your appeal must be filed by October 05, 2010. You may file your request for further appeal in person at or by mail to the following address:

Board of Appeals
1100 North Eutaw Street
Room 515
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
Fax 410-767-2787
Phone 410-767-2781

NOTE: Appeals filed by mail are considered timely on the date of the U.S. Postal Service postmark.

Date of hearing: September 07, 2010
DW/Specialist ID: UTW64
Seq No: 002
Copies mailed on September 20, 2010 to:
BONITA S. SETTERS
PYSCH ASSOCIATES OF MARYLAND
LOCAL OFFICE #60
ANDREW M. DANSICKER ESQ.