



Citation: *PM v Canada Employment Insurance Commission*, 2023 SST 101

## **Social Security Tribunal of Canada Appeal Division**

# **Leave to Appeal Decision**

<b>Applicant:</b>	P. M.
<b>Respondent:</b>	Canada Employment Insurance Commission
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<b>Decision under appeal:</b>	General Division decision dated November 21, 2022 (GE-22-2325)
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<b>Tribunal member:</b>	Pierre Lafontaine
<b>Decision date:</b>	January 31, 2023
<b>File number:</b>	AD-22-956

## Decision

[1] Leave to appeal is refused. This means the appeal will not proceed.

## Overview

[2] The Applicant (Claimant) lost his job because he did not comply with the employer's COVID-19 vaccination policy (Policy). He was refused an exemption based on religious beliefs. The Claimant then applied for Employment Insurance (EI) regular benefits.

[3] The Respondent (Commission) determined that the Claimant lost his job because of misconduct, so it was not able to pay him benefits. After an unsuccessful reconsideration, the Claimant appealed to the General Division.

[4] The General Division found that the Claimant was suspended and then lost his job following his refusal to follow the employer's Policy. His request for exemption based on his religious beliefs was denied. It found that the Claimant knew or ought to have known that the employer was likely to dismiss him in these circumstances. The General Division concluded that the Claimant lost his job because of misconduct.

[5] The Claimant seeks leave to appeal of the General Division's decision to the Appeal Division. He submits that his collective agreement makes no mention of vaccination requirements as a condition of employment. He submits that the employer refused without merits his request for a religious exemption. The Claimant submits that he is now being called back to work and that the employer changed his status from termination with cause to an unpaid leave of absence.

[6] I must decide whether the Claimant has raised some reviewable error of the General Division upon which the appeal might succeed.

[7] I refuse leave to appeal because the Claimant's appeal has no reasonable chance of success.

## Issue

[8] Does the Claimant raise some reviewable error of the General Division upon which the appeal might succeed?

## Analysis

[9] Section 58(1) of the *Department of Employment and Social Development Act* specifies the only grounds of appeal of a General Division decision. These reviewable errors are that:

1. The General Division hearing process was not fair in some way.
2. The General Division did not decide an issue that it should have decided. Or, it decided something it did not have the power to decide.
3. The General Division based its decision on an important error of fact.
4. The General Division made an error of law when making its decision.

[10] An application for leave to appeal is a preliminary step to a hearing on the merits. It is an initial hurdle for the Claimant to meet, but it is lower than the one that must be met on the hearing of the appeal on the merits. At the leave to appeal stage, the Claimant does not have to prove his case but must establish that the appeal has a reasonable chance of success based on a reviewable error. In other words, that there is arguably some reviewable error upon which the appeal might succeed.

[11] Therefore, before I can grant leave to appeal, I need to be satisfied that the reasons for appeal fall within any of the above-mentioned grounds of appeal and that at least one of the reasons has a reasonable chance of success.

**Does the Claimant raise some reviewable error of the General Division upon which the appeal might succeed?**

[12] The Claimant submits that his collective agreement makes no mention of vaccination requirements as a condition of employment. He submits that the employer refused without merits his request for a religious exemption. The Claimant submits that he is now being called back to work and that the employer changed his status from termination with cause to an unpaid leave of absence.

[13] The General Division had to decide whether the Claimant lost his job because of misconduct.

[14] The notion of misconduct does not imply that it is necessary that the breach of conduct be the result of wrongful intent; it is sufficient that the misconduct be conscious, deliberate, or intentional. In other words, in order to constitute misconduct, the act complained of must have been wilful or at least of such a careless or negligent nature that one could say the employee wilfully disregarded the effects their actions would have on their performance.

[15] The General Division's role is not to judge the severity of the employer's penalty or to determine whether the employer was guilty of misconduct by dismissing the Claimant in such a way that his dismissal was unjustified, but rather of deciding whether the Claimant was guilty of misconduct and whether this misconduct led to his dismissal.<sup>1</sup>

[16] Based on the evidence, the General Division determined that the Claimant lost his job because he refused to follow the Policy. He had been informed of the employer's Policy and was given time to comply. He was not granted an exemption for religious beliefs. The Claimant refused intentionally; this refusal was wilful. This was the direct cause of his dismissal. The General Division found that the Claimant knew or ought to have known that his refusal to comply with the Policy could lead to his suspension.

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<sup>1</sup> *Canada (Attorney general) v Marion*, 2002 FCA 185; *Fleming v Canada (Attorney General)*, 2006 FCA 16.

[17] The General Division concluded from the preponderant evidence that the Claimant's behavior constituted misconduct.

[18] It is well-established that a deliberate violation of the employer's policy is considered misconduct within the meaning of the *Employment Insurance Act* (EI Act).<sup>2</sup>

[19] It is not really in dispute that an employer has an obligation to take all reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of its employees in their workplace. In the present case, the employer followed the recommendations of public health officials in order to implement its Policy to protect the health of all employees and clients during the pandemic. The Policy was in effect when the Claimant was dismissed.

[20] The question of whether the employer's policy did not follow the Claimant's collective agreement, or whether the employer violated his human rights, or whether the employer should have accepted his request for an exemption based on his religious beliefs, is a matter for another forum. This Tribunal is not the appropriate forum through which the Claimant can obtain the remedy that he is seeking.<sup>3</sup>

[21] The Federal Court has rendered a recent decision in *Cecchetto* regarding misconduct and a claimant's refusal to follow the employer's COVID-19 vaccination policy.<sup>4</sup>

[22] The Federal Court confirmed the Appeal Division's decision that, by law, this Tribunal is not permitted to address these questions. The Court agreed that by making a personal and deliberate choice not to follow the employer's vaccination policy, the Claimant had lost his job because of misconduct under the EI Act. The Court stated that there exist other ways in which the Claimant's claims can properly advance under the legal system.

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<sup>2</sup> *Canada (Attorney General) v Bellavance*, 2005 FCA 87; *Canada (Attorney General) v Gagnon*, 2002 FCA 460.

<sup>3</sup> In *Paradis v Canada (Attorney General)*, 2016 FC 1282, the Claimant argued that the employer's policy violated his rights under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. The Court found it was a matter for another forum; See also *Mishibinijima v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2007 FCA 36, stating that the employer's duty to accommodate is irrelevant in deciding misconduct cases.

<sup>4</sup> *Cecchetto v Canada (Attorney general)*, 2023 FC 102.

[23] In the previous *Paradis* case, the Claimant was refused EI benefits because of misconduct. He argued that the employer's policy violated his rights under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. The Federal Court found it was a matter for another forum.

[24] The Federal Court stated that there are available remedies for a claimant to sanction the behaviour of an employer other than transferring the costs of that behaviour to the Employment Insurance Program.

[25] In the *Mishibinijima* case, the Federal Court of Appeal stated that the employer's duty to accommodate is irrelevant in deciding EI misconduct cases.

[26] As stated previously, the question submitted to the General Division was not whether the employer was guilty of misconduct by dismissing the Claimant such that this would constitute unjust dismissal, but whether the Claimant was guilty of misconduct under the EI Act and whether this misconduct resulted in the Claimant being dismissed.

[27] The preponderant evidence before the General Division shows that the Claimant **made a personal and deliberate choice** not to follow the employer's Policy in response to the exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic and this resulted in him being dismissed from work.

[28] I see no reviewable error made by the General Division when it decided the issue of misconduct solely within the parameters set out by the Federal Court of Appeal, which has defined misconduct under the EI Act.<sup>5</sup>

[29] I am fully aware that the Claimant may seek relief before another forum, if a violation is established.<sup>6</sup> This does not change the fact that under the EI Act, the

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<sup>5</sup> *Paradis v Canada (Attorney General)*; 2016 FC 1282; *Canada (Attorney General) v McNamara*, 2007 FCA 107; CUB 73739A, CUB 58491; CUB 49373.

<sup>6</sup> I note that in a recent decision, the Superior Court of Quebec has ruled that provisions that imposed the vaccination, although they infringed the liberty and security of the person, did not violate section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights*. Even if section 7 of the Charter were to be found to have been violated, this violation would be justified as being a reasonable limit under section 1 of the Charter - *Syndicat des métallos, section locale 2008 c Procureur général du Canada*, 2022 QCCS 2455 (Only in French at the time of publishing).

Commission has proven on a balance of probabilities that the Claimant was dismissed because of misconduct.

[30] Even though the Claimant says that the employer changed his status and called him back to work, this fact does not change the nature of the misconduct that initially led to the Claimant's dismissal.<sup>7</sup>

[31] In his application for leave to appeal, the Claimant has not identified any reviewable errors such as jurisdiction or any failure by the General Division to observe a principle of natural justice. He has not identified errors in law nor identified any erroneous findings of fact, which the General Division may have made in a perverse or capricious manner or without regard for the material before it, in coming to its decision.

[32] After reviewing the docket of appeal, the decision of the General Division and considering the arguments of the Claimant in support of his request for leave to appeal, I find that the appeal has no reasonable chance of success.

## **Conclusion**

[33] Leave to appeal is refused. This means the appeal will not proceed.

Pierre Lafontaine  
Member, Appeal Division

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<sup>7</sup> *Canada (Attorney general) v Boulton*, 1996 FCA 1682; *Canada (Attorney General) v Morrow*, 1999 FCA 193.