

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by
Minn. R. Civ. App. P. 136.01, subd. 1(c).*

**STATE OF MINNESOTA
IN COURT OF APPEALS
A25-0791**

Shura Johnson,
Relator,

vs.

Smith Trucking, Inc.,
Respondent,

Department of Employment and Economic Development,
Respondent.

**Filed January 26, 2026
Affirmed
Frisch, Chief Judge**

Department of Employment and Economic Development
File No. 51447470-3

Shura Johnson, Hanover Township, Pennsylvania (pro se relator)

Smith Trucking, Inc., Worthington, Minnesota (respondent employer)

Melannie Markham, Keri A. Phillips, Katrina Gulstad, Minnesota Department of
Employment and Economic Development, St. Paul, Minnesota (for respondent
department)

Considered and decided by Frisch, Chief Judge; Worke, Judge; and Cochran, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

FRISCH, Chief Judge

Relator challenges the determination by an unemployment-law judge (ULJ) that he
was ineligible for unemployment benefits. Relator argues that the ULJ erred in

determining that he quit his employment and that no statutory exception to ineligibility applies. Because the ULJ's determination that relator is not eligible for unemployment benefits is substantially supported by evidence in the record, we affirm.

FACTS

Relator Shura Johnson was employed full-time by respondent-employer Smith Trucking, Inc. as an over-the-road truck driver from January 12, 2024, to January 8, 2025, when he signed a document stating that he resigned from his position.

Johnson thereafter applied for unemployment benefits. Johnson indicated in his application that the reason for his employment separation was a non-medical leave of absence for "education." Respondent Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) issued an initial determination that Johnson was ineligible for unemployment benefits because he quit suitable employment to enter or prepare for school or training. *See* Minn. Stat. § 268.095, subd. 1(4) (2024) (providing an exception to ineligibility based on quitting for applicants who quit *unsuitable* employment to enter reemployment-assistance training).

Johnson appealed, and a ULJ conducted a hearing, during which Johnson and the general manager and vice president of Smith Trucking testified. In response to the ULJ's question if Johnson quit his employment, Johnson testified that he signed the resignation letter because it accurately reflected that his last day of employment was January 8. He further testified that the "ultimate reason" why he left his job was due to a "financial hardship" that forced him to leave, and his plan was to "get back in school." Johnson testified that he did not mention his financial hardship to Smith Trucking because they did

not have anything to do with it. Johnson also testified that he was not currently in school because he was unable to pay for tuition.

The general manager testified that work was available for Johnson and the only reason Johnson's employment ended "was just because he wanted to finish up some classes that he had been taking online." He testified that Johnson quit "with the understanding that he said once he was done with his classes that he intended to return"—though Johnson did not have a specific end date—and that Johnson would need to reapply if he wanted to return to employment. The general manager further testified that Johnson did not complain about any working conditions while employed.

The ULJ issued findings of fact and a decision, concluding that Johnson was ineligible for unemployment benefits because he quit his job for personal reasons and not due to any adverse working conditions for which Smith Trucking was responsible, and that no exception to ineligibility for quitting applied. The ULJ based its findings "on the most likely sequence of events considering Department records and [the general manager's] testimony, which was credible because it was logical, detailed, based on first-hand knowledge, and supported by the letter of resignation." The ULJ gave Johnson's testimony "limited weight because it evolved into illogical explanations contradicted by his own written submissions and [the general manager's] credible testimony."

Johnson requested reconsideration. *See* Minn. Stat. § 268.105, subd. 2 (2024). In his request for reconsideration, Johnson asserted that the ULJ "did not mention that [Johnson] was in a very toxic work environment." He claimed he got a skin rash due to rust on a lock and chain on the back of a trailer and that he complained about a safety

problem involving his air brake that was never rectified. Johnson also stated that another ULJ determined he “may be eligible for unemployment benefits . . . so long as all eligibility requirements are met,” based on Johnson’s availability for suitable employment and actively seeking such employment. *See* Minn. Stat. § 268.085, subd. 1 (2024).

A different ULJ affirmed the ineligibility determination, concluding that Johnson had not “provided any information or arguments that require changing the decision or ordering another hearing.”

This certiorari appeal follows.

DECISION

Johnson seeks reversal of the determination that he was not eligible for unemployment benefits. We understand Johnson to argue that he did not quit his employment and that if he did quit, he qualifies for a statutory exception to ineligibility based on quitting. We address each argument in turn.

On certiorari review of the ULJ’s decision on reconsideration, we may affirm the ULJ’s decision, remand for further proceedings, or we may reverse or modify the ULJ’s decision if the relator’s substantial rights may have been prejudiced because the decision was, among other things, unsupported by substantial evidence. Minn. Stat. § 268.105, subd. 7 (2024). “We view the ULJ’s factual findings in the light most favorable to the decision, giving deference to the credibility determinations made by the ULJ and will not disturb the ULJ’s factual findings when the evidence substantially sustains them.” *Goede v. Astra Zeneca Pharms., LP*, 992 N.W.2d 700, 708 (Minn. App. 2023) (quotations

omitted), *rev. denied* (Minn. Sept. 19, 2023), *cert. denied*, 144 S. Ct. 1115 (2024); *see also* Minn. Stat. § 268.105, subd. 7(d)(5).

I. The ULJ’s determination that Johnson quit his employment is supported by substantial evidence in the record.

Johnson initially challenges the ULJ’s determination that he quit his employment, asserting that he requested unemployment benefits based on a non-medical leave of absence for education purposes. An applicant for unemployment benefits is ineligible for benefits if they quit their employment unless an exception applies. Minn. Stat. § 268.095, subd. 1 (2024). “Whether an employee quit is a question of fact for the ULJ.” *Ward v. Delta Airlines*, 973 N.W.2d 649, 652 (Minn. App. 2022), *rev. denied* (Minn. June 21, 2022). “A quit from employment occurs when the decision to end the employment was, at the time the employment ended, the employee’s.” Minn. Stat. § 268.095, subd. 2(a) (2024).

The ULJ found that Johnson quit his employment. This finding is supported by substantial evidence in the record. Johnson signed a document stating that he resigned from his position. When asked about this resignation document at the hearing, Johnson testified: “[T]heir letter did state that my last day was on the 8th, and I did sign it because it was correct. And the, the ultimate reason why I left that job was because I had a financial hardship that forced me to leave” The general manager testified that there was continuing work available for Johnson, and the only reason the employment ended was

because Johnson said he wanted to finish up some classes. Therefore, the evidence substantially supports the ULJ's finding that Johnson quit his employment.¹

II. Johnson does not meet a statutory exception to ineligibility based on quitting.

Johnson next challenges the ULJ's determination that he does not meet a statutory exception to ineligibility based on quitting. Whether an applicant for unemployment benefits qualifies for an exception to ineligibility for quitting employment is a question of law, which we review de novo. *See Ward*, 973 N.W.2d at 652 (“Whether an employee had good cause to quit is a question of law, which we review de novo.” (quotation omitted)).

We understand Johnson to argue that he qualifies for either an exception related to reemployment-assistance training or an exception related to a good reason for quitting caused by the employer. We are not persuaded either exception applies.

An exception to ineligibility because of quitting applies if “the employment was unsuitable and the applicant quit to enter reemployment assistance training.” Minn. Stat. § 268.095, subd. 1(4). DEED initially determined that Johnson did not qualify for this reemployment-assistance-training exception because his “employment was suitable, as it was reasonably related to the applicant’s qualifications and employment history.” Johnson has not disputed DEED’s determination that his employment with Smith Trucking was

¹ Even if we concluded that there was insufficient evidence to support the ULJ’s determination that Johnson quit—which we do not—Johnson fails to address how a determination that he was instead on a non-medical leave of absence would render him eligible for unemployment benefits. An applicant for unemployment benefits who is on a voluntary leave of absence is ineligible for benefits for the duration of the leave. Minn. Stat. § 268.085, subd. 13a(a) (2024); *see also* Minn. Stat. § 268.085, subd. 13a(c) (2024) (defining a “leave of absence”).

suitable—a determination that is supported by substantial evidence in the record. And Johnson testified at the hearing that he was not enrolled in school or training. We therefore conclude that Johnson does not qualify for the reemployment-assistance-training exception.

Another exception to ineligibility based on quitting applies if “the applicant quit the employment because of a good reason caused by the employer.” Minn. Stat. § 268.095, subd. 1(1). A good reason caused by the employer for quitting must be (1) directly related to the employment and for which the employer is responsible; (2) adverse to the worker; and (3) one “that would compel an average, reasonable worker to quit and become unemployed rather than remaining in the employment.” *Id.*, subd. 3(a) (2024). “If an applicant was subjected to adverse working conditions by the employer, the applicant must complain to the employer and give the employer a reasonable opportunity to correct the adverse working conditions before that may be a good reason caused by the employer for quitting.” *Id.*, subd. 3(c) (2024).

The ULJ determined that Johnson did not have a good reason for quitting caused by Smith Trucking because Johnson quit due to personal reasons and not due to any adverse working conditions for which the employer was responsible. This conclusion is supported by Johnson’s and the general manager’s testimony and the resignation letter. Johnson testified that he left his employment due to financial hardship caused by personal expenses. He testified that he did not mention his financial hardship to Smith Trucking because they did not have anything to do with it. There is therefore no support in the record to find

Johnson's personal financial hardship was a reason directly related to his employment for which Smith Trucking was responsible.

Further, to the extent Johnson argues he had a good reason for quitting caused by Smith Trucking because of "safety issues" and/or a "toxic work environment," the ULJ found Johnson's claims not to be credible. "Credibility determinations are the exclusive province of the ULJ and will not be disturbed on appeal." *Bangtson v. Allina Med. Grp.*, 766 N.W.2d 328, 332 (Minn. App. 2009) (quotation omitted). We defer to the ULJ's ability to weigh conflicting evidence, and we "may not weigh that evidence on review." *Whitehead v. Moonlight Nursing Care, Inc.*, 529 N.W.2d 350, 352 (Minn. App. 1995).

The ULJ made specific credibility findings on the testimony offered by both Johnson and the general manager that are supported by substantial evidence. Johnson testified at the hearing about his purported complaints regarding a skin rash caused by rust from a chain and a "safety issue" related to the air brake. The ULJ gave Johnson's testimony "limited weight because it evolved into illogical explanations contradicted by his own written submissions and [the general manager's] credible testimony" and because Johnson "had no credible explanation for why he provided a different version of events in his written submissions." On the other hand, the ULJ found that the general manager's testimony was "credible because it was logical, detailed, based on first-hand knowledge, and supported by the letter of resignation." Thus, the ULJ supported its specific credibility determinations with logical explanations, and the conclusions are supported by Johnson's written submissions and the general manager's testimony. Therefore, we defer to the ULJ's

decision not to credit Johnson's testimony regarding these alleged safety and working-condition issues.

In sum, because substantial record evidence supports the ULJ's determination that Johnson quit his employment without good reason caused by the employer, and no other exception to ineligibility applies, we affirm the ULJ's conclusion that Johnson was ineligible for unemployment benefits.²

Affirmed.

² Johnson also argues that another ULJ determined that Johnson may meet other eligibility requirements, including being "available for suitable employment" and "actively seeking suitable employment," under Minn. Stat. § 268.085, subd. 1. But the determination that Johnson met these ongoing requirements for eligibility does not undermine our conclusion that Johnson is ineligible for benefits based on the circumstances of his employment separation, an independent basis on which an applicant may be ineligible for unemployment benefits. *See* Minn. Stat. § 268.069, subd. 1 (setting forth multiple requirements applicant must meet to be eligible for unemployment benefits).