

ALERT

New Research Brief

California Leads Nation in Women-Owned Businesses

While women-owned businesses are growing, reports show sustained efforts required to keep momentum



A new **research brief** from the University of Southern California highlights

California's national leadership in women-owned businesses, finding that the state is home to 1.5 million women-led companies — **more than any other state** — among other key insights.

The report was prepared for the CalChamber Women's Leadership Council and was presented at the council's forum in Sacramento on March 25.

Face of Business

"The impact of women on California's economy is undeniable, with nearly 40 percent of all businesses in the state being women-owned," said Jennifer Barrera,

See California Leads: Page 4

Rana Ghadban to Head CalChamber Small Business Advocacy



Rana Ghadban

Local chamber of commerce executive Rana Ghadban will be joining the California Chamber of Commerce next month as vice president of small business advocacy.

Ghadban has more than 15 years of experience leading local chambers, most recently serving three years as CEO of the Roseville Area Chamber of Commerce.

"Rana brings us a wealth of chamber experience and we're thrilled to have her join our team," said CalChamber President and CEO Jennifer Barrera. "Californians are rightly worried about the cost of daily living, and as we look ahead at how best to advocate for consumer and business affordability, it's essential we have the best in our industry leading the charge."

"In my role with the Roseville Area Chamber of Commerce, I've been committed to strengthening strategic partnerships with business leaders, launching new programs to connect local businesses with qualified talent and working to expand community resources," said Ghadban. "I am eager to continue that work helping local chambers and small businesses in their advocacy efforts at CalChamber."

Ghadban has served as president and
See Rana Ghadban: Page 4



Photo by bryanpatrickphoto.com

(From left) CalChamber President and CEO Jennifer Barrera; Dee Dee Myers, senior advisor to the Governor and director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz); Brenda Rejamand, CEO and founder of BD Tax & Finance Group Inc. and past chair of the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation; Raji Brar, COO of Countryside Corporation and co-chair of the Women's Leadership Council; Maryam Brown, CEO of SoCalGas and current chair of the CalChamber Board of Directors; Katherine Aguilar Perez, adjunct associate professor, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy; Donna L. Lucas, CEO and founder of Lucas Public Affairs and chair, Women's Leadership Council; and Jessica Word, CEO, Word & Brown General Agency.

Inside

[What Supervisors Need to Know, Part 1: Page 3](#)

*Labor Law Corner***‘Misconduct’ Not Automatic Cause for Denying Unemployment Benefits**

Lisa Guzman
Employment Law
Expert

We terminated an employee, and she has filed a claim for unemployment benefits. We want to fight her claim because she was fired for falsifying accounting records, a violation of company policy. Can you please explain the type of “misconduct” that will result in a denial of unemployment benefits?

Responding to unemployment insurance (UI) benefit claims can be a

complex process for employers. It is important that an employer understands the legal definition of misconduct before deciding whether to challenge a terminated employee’s claim for unemployment benefits.

Unemployment Insurance Code

Under California Unemployment Insurance Code Section 1256, certain factors can disqualify an employee from receiving unemployment insurance benefits, such as voluntarily quitting a job without good cause.

If an employer fires an employee, unemployment benefits will be denied only if the employer can show that the employee was discharged for misconduct connected with his or her most recent work.

Definition of Misconduct

“Misconduct,” as used in the code, is defined as willful or wanton disregard of an employer’s interests, or such carelessness or negligence as to manifest equal culpability. (*Amador v. Unemployment*

Insurance Appeals Board, 35 Cal. 3d 671 (1984); UI Code, Section 1256)).

It is important to note that this is a narrow definition of misconduct. Terminations for mere inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, poor job performance, inadvertent errors or ordinary negligence in isolated instances, or good-faith errors in judgment or discretion will not rise to the level of misconduct.

On the other hand, the following are examples of misconduct that typically will result in denial of unemployment benefits: theft, fraud, intoxication, deliberate violation of safety rules, workplace violence, deliberately falsifying a time-card and harassment.

The California Employment Development Department (EDD) has a *Benefit Determination Guide* available on its website that provides some helpful guidance on what constitutes misconduct.

Examine Actual Misconduct

Employers should understand that terminating an employee for misconduct

See ‘Misconduct’: Page 7

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CalChamber-Sponsored Seminars/Trade Shows

More information at www.calchamber.com.

Human Resources

What to Expect When Your Employee Is Expecting: PDL and Child-Bonding Leave. CalChamber. April 17, Online. (800) 331-8877.

HR Boot Camp. CalChamber. April 24–25, June 5–6, September 11–12, Online. (800) 331-8877.

Leaves of Absence. CalChamber. May 8–9, August 7–8, Online. (800) 331-8877.

Supervisor Essentials: Workplace Compliance. CalChamber. July 17, Online. (800) 331-8877.

International Trade

WCF Africa Summit 2025: Africa’s Global Future. ICC World Chambers Federation and Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. April 9–11, Nairobi, Kenya. ana.bernal@iccwbo.org.

Health Engineering and Minerals Show (HEMS) 2025 – Pakistan. Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP). April 17–19. 92-345-465-

8469, omer.bajwa@tdap.gov.pk.
Exim 2025 Annual Conference.

Export-Import Bank of the United States. April 29–30, Washington, D.C. In-person only. [Registration now open](#).

Access Africa Now: Empowering Africa’s Financial Future — Exploring FinTech’s Role in Growth and Opportunity. Webinar Series. U.S. Commercial Service. April 29-June 24, Online. [Webinar website](#).

Annual Export Conference. National Association of District Export Councils. May 19–20, Washington, D.C. [Conference website](#).

14th World Chambers Congress. World Chambers Congress. September 2–September 4, Melbourne, Australia. <https://wcc.iccwbo.org/>.

CalChamber Calendar

California Business Outlook and Dinner:
June 4, Sacramento

The Workplace

What Supervisors Need to Know, Part I: ‘Hard’ Compliance Skills



In Episode 219 of The Workplace podcast, CalChamber Associate General Counsel Matthew Roberts, Senior Employment

Law Counsel Erika Barbara and Employment Law Subject Matter Expert Vanessa Greene tackle what is often referred to as “hard” compliance skills necessary for supervisors to help maintain a liability-free workplace in California.

The state’s complex regulatory environment can create a number of legal quagmires for companies that are not staying on top of employee compliance and training — especially where managers and front-line supervisors are concerned.

Breaks Interrupted

Avoiding Wage and Hour Compliance Problems

One of the many areas in which businesses may find themselves in legal trouble relates to wage and hour issues — meal and rest breaks, timekeeping, etc. The lack of understanding — or worse yet, a lack of consistent enforcement — by managers and supervisors can lead to compliance issues and claims against a company.

“California has so many wage and hour requirements, so that means there’s many, many areas where compliance issues can come up, but one of the most common that we see is around meal and rest breaks,” Barbara explains.

Interrupting an employee on their lunch break or not requiring them to take it at the proper time, for example, constitutes a violation of wage and hour laws. Even asking simple questions of an employee who is on their break is problematic and creates unnecessary liability for the employer, Barbara explains. As such, supervisors must be trained to understand and enforce these rules.

“Supervisors can create risk if they don’t understand the law. So, we may have a business with legally compliant wage and hour policies in the handbook, but if the supervisors don’t understand those policies, or they do understand them and they’re just not following them, they’re creating potential liability, particularly with meal and rest breaks.” Barbara adds.

In a similar vein, accurate timekeeping is also essential to avoiding violations. Businesses must ensure that they can account for employee time accurately and that supervisors put a stop to unacceptable employee behaviors, like off-the-clock work.

Barbara recommends a three-part approach to prevent wage-and-hour compliance problems: having compliant policies, comprehensive training for supervisors and holding supervisors and managers accountable for enforcing the policies consistently.

When to Elevate Requests

Employee accommodation and leave requests are one particularly sticky area for supervisors, according to Greene, who notes that many don’t have the necessary understanding of the law to make snap assessments independent of HR.

In California, sick leave is protected and the law prohibits a supervisor from asking an employee for a doctor’s note or forcing them to find someone to cover their shift when they are using sick leave. Similarly, requests for accommodations for things like disabilities or pregnancy should be taken to HR immediately to make sure the request is handled appropriately and within the law.

“I think a simple rule of thumb is just telling supervisors if an employee mentions any kind of limitation or any kind of need, flag it for HR. Instead of making your own judgment call, make sure to loop in HR,” Greene says.

Consistency Is Key

Discipline and Termination

It’s not unusual for a supervisor to have a favorite employee, but it can be a problem if the rules are being enforced inconsistently. The same is true when it comes to performance evaluations.

Greene sees the most problems in this area when supervisors are conducting performance evaluations unevenly or failing to document issues. When it comes time to terminate an employee, the evidence to support the decision simply isn’t there.

It’s important to set clear expectations, address issues as soon as they arise, and document any item of interest — this can range from simple feedback about a project to more serious corrective guidance.

“If it’s not written down, it didn’t happen,” Green says, driving home the point that documentation is the evidence an employer needs to prove that a termination is justified.

Setting the Tone

Keeping Harassment Out of the Workplace

One of the most critical functions of a supervisor is to report inappropriate or harassing behavior among employees as quickly as possible. Whether they witness the unacceptable conduct firsthand or receive a complaint from an employee, they have a legal duty to report the conduct to the company so it can be addressed promptly.

Under the law, once a supervisor is aware of this sort of behavior, it’s deemed that the company is aware as well — even if the supervisor never reported the issue to HR, Barbara notes. “No complaint should ever stop with them; they have to make sure that they report it to the appropriate person...” she emphasizes.

When handling complaints from subordinates, Greene says supervisors must be cautious not to promise complete confidentiality while also making an effort to keep the complaint as confidential as possible. While they have an obligation to elevate the complaint to HR, sharing juicy details about a complaint or incident should be avoided at all costs.

Supervisors can also be their own vectors for liability, Barbara says. Because supervisors set the tone for their teams, any inappropriate behavior on their parts can become a much larger issue when other staff members follow their lead.

“Remember, there’s strict liability for harassment by supervisors, meaning that a company can be liable for harassing conduct by a supervisor even if it doesn’t know that the conduct was occurring. So, we really need to make sure that our supervisors are conducting themselves in a respectful and a professional way in the workplace,” Barbara says.

These “hard skills” are not the only tools supervisors need to manage their workforce. Part 2 of this podcast will cover the “soft skills” that are just as important for supervisors to lead their teams effectively and keep their companies in compliance.

California Leads Nation in Women-Owned Businesses

From Page 1

president and CEO of CalChamber.

“Women-owned businesses are significant contributors to the state’s economy, having added \$580 billion in revenue between 2019–2023. When people talk about business in California, the face of business also includes a large number of successful women.”

The forum brought together elected officials, local influencers and business leaders from across the state.

Premier sponsors of the event were Lucas Public Affairs and Word & Brown.

Dynamic Presentations

The Women’s Leadership Forum & Reception began with a research

presentation by Katherine Aguilar Perez of USC and was followed by a vibrant discussion moderated by Barrera, featuring a panel of dynamic women leaders, including:

- Dee Dee Myers – Senior Advisor to the Governor and Director of the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development.

- Maryam Brown – CEO of SoCalGas and current Chair of the CalChamber Board of Directors.

- Raji Brar – COO of Countryside Corporation and Co-Chair of the Women’s Leadership Council.

- Brenda Rejamand – CEO and Founder of BD Tax & Finance Group Inc. and Past Chair of the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

“The research is clear — women are

2 Continue research focused on women business needs and the impact of women on California’s business environment.

3. Raise awareness of financing options and investment opportunities to increase women’s access to capital.

4. Support networks for women business owners, increase contracting opportunities.

“CalChamber is proud to support women in business, and we look forward to ongoing work that incorporates the recommendations that will continue to uplift women in business,” Barrera added.

Women’s Leadership Council

The California Chamber of Commerce established the Women’s Leadership Council (WLC), a subcommittee

of the CalChamber Board of Directors, to elevate the voice of women in business. Chaired by Donna L. Lucas, CEO and founder of Lucas Public Affairs, with Raji K. Brar, COO and co-owner of Countryside Corporation, serving as vice chair, the WLC brings together accomplished leaders from across industries to strengthen the presence and impact of California’s women business leaders.

The council fosters connections with key decision makers in state government and highlights the vital contributions of women to the state’s economy. For more information and a full list of council members, visit calchamber.com/wlc.



Photo by bryanpatrickphoto.com

On stage (from left) CalChamber President and CEO Jennifer Barrera; Dee Dee Myers, senior advisor to the Governor and director of the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz); Brenda Rejamand, CEO and founder of BD Tax & Finance Group Inc. and past chair of the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation; Raji Brar, COO of Countryside Corporation and co-chair of the Women’s Leadership Council; Maryam Brown, CEO of SoCalGas and current chair of the CalChamber Board of Directors; Donna L. Lucas, CEO and founder of Lucas Public Affairs and chair, Women’s Leadership Council.

making remarkable gains in business ownership and in corporate leadership and board positions,” said Perez. “When women are in executive and leadership positions, it fosters opportunity and growth for women across all levels of business.”

Recommendations

Based on several recent comprehensive reports, recommendations to support women-owned businesses include the following actions:

1. Support inclusive policies in California and reduce barriers to women owning businesses.

Rana Ghadban to Head CalChamber Small Business Advocacy

From Page 1

CEO of the Hollywood, Simi Valley, Calabasas and Chatsworth/Porter Ranch chambers of commerce. She steps in to fill the CalChamber position previously held by Nick Ortiz.

Ghadban graduated with honors from Saint Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon, earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees in business administration and management. She also holds an MBA with an emphasis in management from

California State University, Northridge.

She is a graduate of the Western Association of Chamber Executives (W.A.C.E.) Academy program and a member of the W.A.C.E. Board.

The Trump Tariffs

Challenges/Opportunities for California's Trading Relationships Across the Americas



Richard Kiy

With a gross state product of over \$4 trillion representing 13.7% of the U.S. nominal gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024, California ranks as the fifth largest economy

in the world. Here, international trade and investment is a major part of our state's economic engine with broad-based benefits to our businesses and communities with California's global exports exceeding \$183.3 billion in 2024.

Among California's trading partners, Mexico and Canada collectively represent nearly 27% of our state's total exports, with Mexico totaling \$33.5 billion and Canada \$13.4 billion last year.

In the case of Mexico, its exports to the United States topped \$505.9 billion

Guest Commentary By Richard Kiy

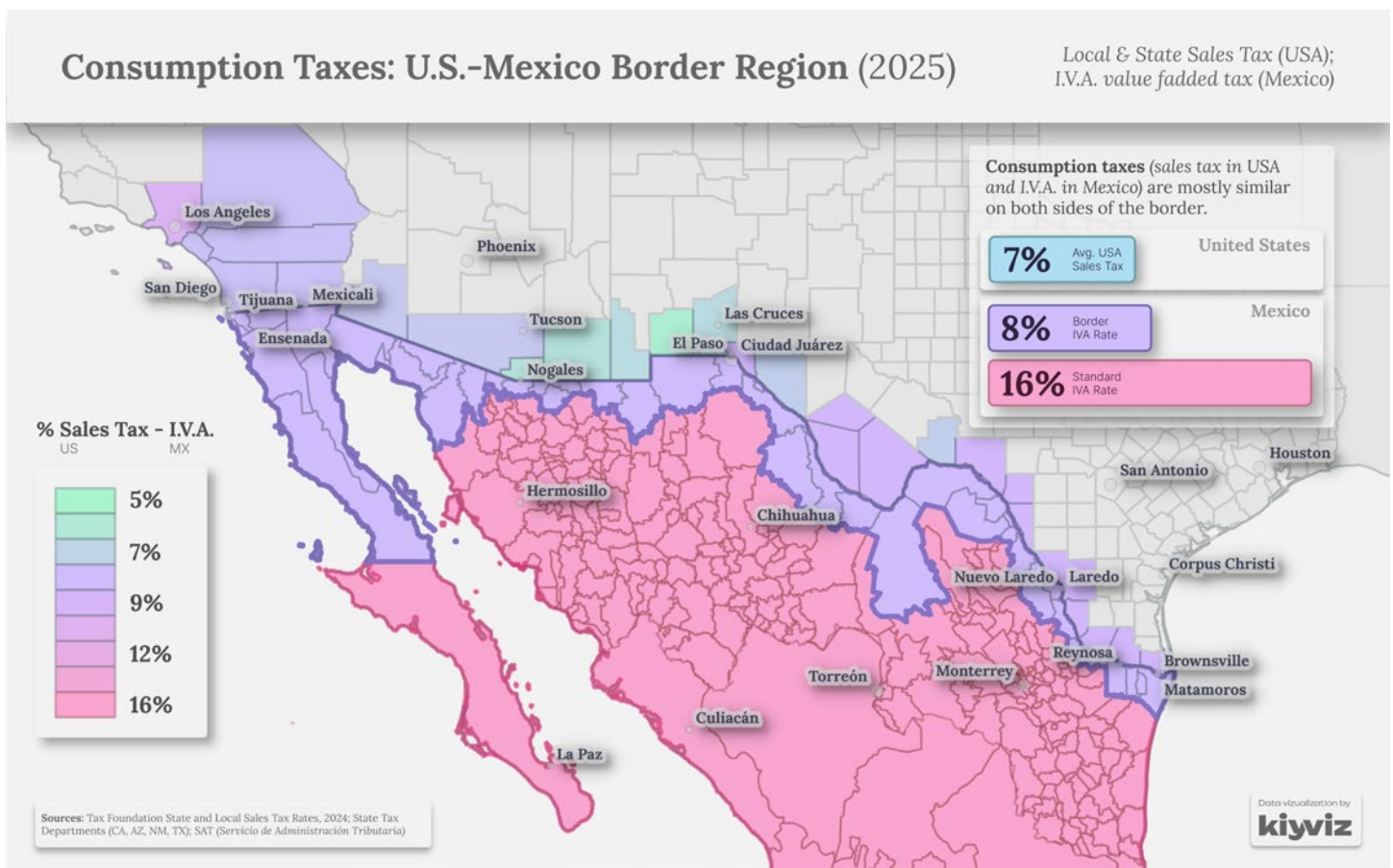
of which \$64.3 billion or 12.7% were imports to California. Other leading markets for California-based companies across the Americas include Chile with \$1.8 billion export sales and Brazil with nearly \$1.7 billion in 2024.

Given the importance of exports to the California economy, there is understandable concern among California's internationally focused companies specific to the Trump administration's on-and-off tariffs and the potential economic blowback that retaliatory tariffs could have from some of our state's existing trading partners if tariffs do, in the end, go through as originally planned.

Upcoming Announcement

More will be known on April 2 in what President Trump is calling "Liberation Day" when his administration plans to announce tariffs on targeted countries, including Mexico and Canada, as part of its [America First Trade Policy](#) issued on January 20 and presidential memoran-

See Tariffs: Page 6



Tariffs and California’s Trading Relationships Across the Americas

From Page 5

dum on [Reciprocal Trade & Tariffs](#) issued on February 13. That said, 25% tariffs have been announced on all imported foreign-made autos and additional tariffs are forthcoming on pharmaceuticals and wood products. The announced tariffs will be a big blow to Mexican and Canadian autoworkers.

Beyond already-announced plans, the Trump administration also appears intent on initially applying reciprocal tariffs on a set of 15 countries with persistent trade imbalances. Among the group of nations that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent calls the “dirty 15” are the United States’ two largest trading partners, Mexico and Canada. Last year, both countries ran trade deficits with the U.S. that totaled \$171.8 billion and \$63.3 billion respectively.

Value Added Tax Concerns

What remains to be seen, however, is exactly how reciprocal tariffs will be applied. Of particular concern is how the Trump administration classification of “value added tax” (VAT) as an indirect tariff is subject to consideration in their reciprocal tariff calculations.

After all, VAT is a consumption tax that is a norm around the world, in particular across the Americas, and is applied to both domestically produced and imported goods alike. To equate VAT to tariffs can be problematic without taking other factors into consideration.

The United States is one of the few countries in the world that does not use a national VAT consumption tax. Instead, state and local sales taxes are applied. Combined average sales tax rates can vary from 2% in Alaska to 10% in Louisiana. Although California has a state sales tax of 7.25%, the local sales tax for Los Angeles County is 3% (10.25% combined) and for San Diego County is 0.50% (7.75% combined). Still, in California basic food products are exempt from sales tax as is the case for many, but not all countries, where VAT is applied. According to the International Monetary Fund, the average VAT rate globally is 15.3%.

Canada/Mexico Taxes

Among our U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) trading partners, Mexico has a VAT (otherwise known as

IVA) of 16% and Canada has a national VAT equivalent — goods and services tax (GST) — of 5% although additional provincial taxes also apply. That said, in both countries basic foodstuffs and essential medicines are exempt from VAT.

California’s Top 10 Export Markets in the Americas - 2024

Country	California Exports (\$USD Millions)
Mexico	\$33,517
Canada	\$18,364
Chile	\$1,806
Brazil	\$1,682
Guatemala	\$840
El Salvador	\$705
Peru	\$691
Costa Rica	\$586
Colombia	\$485
Panama	\$470

Source: *Institute of the Americas*

In the case of Mexico, within its northern and southern border frontiers a reduced 8% IVA rate applies, to remain competitive with U.S. sales taxes. This reduced rate applies to 43 municipalities in the northern border region within 100 kilometers of California, including: Tijuana, Rosarito, Ensenada, Tecate, Mexicali in the state of Baja California.

So, at least for Mexico’s border cities, if reciprocal tariffs were to be equitably applied to imports originating from this region (including products produced in border area maquiladora manufacturing/assembly plants), the net tariff should be marginal if tariffs were applied equitably and aligned with the corresponding state and local sales tax rates for their corresponding U.S. border sister cities.

Reciprocal Tariff ‘Breaks’?

Right now, countries beyond the dirty 15 do not appear to be targets of the Trump tariffs. In fact, on March 24, Trump noted, “I may give a lot of countries ‘breaks’ on reciprocal tariffs.” So, if breaks are, in fact, given to the other

countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, including those countries with pre-existing trade agreements — including CAFTA-DR [Central American Free Trade Agreement-Dominican Republic], Chile FTA, Panama FTA, Colombia TPA [Trade Promotion Agreement] and Peru TPA — this could result in opportunities for future trade and investment that could spur expanded economic growth in the region.

Businesses in the San Diego-Tijuana border region are also hoping the “breaks” that Trump is referring to also apply to their products given the lower IVA rates at the border.

Opportunity: Americas Act

Here, an opportunity exists through the [Americas Act](#), a bipartisan initiative, co-sponsored by U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy (R-Louisiana), intended to “establish a regional trade, investment, and people-to-people partnership of countries in the Western Hemisphere to stimulate growth and integration through viable long-term private sector development.”

Key provisions of the Americas Act include: regional trade expansion through the establishment of an Americas Partnership providing a potential pathway for countries like Uruguay and Costa Rica to join the USMCA, thereby creating a more integrated and resilient regional economy; investment promotion with an emphasis on nearshoring and bolstering regional supply chains, strengthening hemispheric energy security and enhancing e-governance across the Americas.

If President Trump gets things right and takes a measured and fair approach to tariffs with countries across the Americas, including Mexico, he and his administration have a historic opportunity to leave a lasting legacy across the hemisphere that will not only make the United States more secure but also build a brighter future for people across the Americas which, over time, will also reduce migration pressures along the U.S. southern border.

Richard Kiy is president and CEO of the [Institute of the Americas](#), an independent, nonpartisan nonprofit organization located in La Jolla, California with a mission to promote economic development and regional integration across the Americas.

‘Misconduct’ Not Automatic Cause for Denying Unemployment Benefits

From Page 2

or violating company policy will not automatically disqualify the employee from receiving unemployment benefits.

A California Supreme Court case established that an employee’s discharge for misconduct will not necessarily bar the employee from receiving unemployment benefits; the employee’s actual misconduct will need to be examined to determine if it meets the criteria established by law. (*Paratransit, Inc. v. Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board*, 59 Cal. 4th 551 (2014)).

In *Paratransit*, an employee refused to sign a disciplinary notice, was terminated for insubordination and then filed for unemployment benefits. The court acknowledged that the employee’s refusal to sign the disciplinary notice may have justified his termination, but the sole issue was whether the employee’s refusal rose to the level of misconduct.

The court found that based on the specific circumstances, the employee’s refusal to sign a disciplinary notice was not misconduct but, at most, a mistake in

judgment that did not disqualify him from an award of unemployment benefits.

In the case of the employer who fired the employee for falsifying accounting records, the EDD will examine the employee’s specific conduct and make an independent determination of whether the employee’s actions rise to the level of misconduct that would bar her from receiving unemployment benefits.

Employer Has Burden Of Proof

Employers also must keep in mind that the law presumes an employee was not fired for misconduct (UI Code, Section 1256). The burden of proving misconduct falls on the employer and it is up to the employer to submit evidence relating to the misconduct.

The employer who fired the employee for falsifying accounting records will need to submit clear evidence of the employee’s misconduct, such as copies of the falsified accounting records, company policies, disciplinary notices, witness statements or any other supporting information or records.

The EDD will require an employer to provide strong proof of misconduct before it disqualifies an employee from receiving unemployment benefits.

Recommended Action

Because of the narrow definition of misconduct under the law, it may prove difficult for an employer to successfully challenge a terminated employee’s unemployment insurance claim.

Before investing the time and money to fight a former employee’s claim for benefits, an employer, in consultation with legal counsel, should evaluate carefully the reason for an employee’s termination and whether the employer can provide evidence of misconduct.

Column based on questions asked by callers on the Labor Law Helpline, a service to California Chamber of Commerce preferred members and above. For expert explanations of labor laws and Cal/OSHA regulations, not legal counsel for specific situations, call (800) 348-2262 or submit your question at www.hrcalifornia.com.

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Upcoming Events >

CalChamber

