

STATE OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

CHRIS CHRISTENSEN, Appellant,

vs.

STATE OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, Respondent.

Case ID: 1.0839

Case Type: PA

DECISION NO. 41286

Appearances:

Michael Clausing, c/o Redgranite Correctional Institution, 1006 Country Road EE, Redgranite, Wisconsin, appearing on behalf of Chris Christensen.

Nicole M. Porter, Attorney, Department of Administration, 101 E. Wilson Street, 10th Floor, P.O. Box 7864, Madison, Wisconsin, appearing on behalf of the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

DECISION AND ORDER

On October 27, 2025, Chris Christensen filed an appeal with the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission asserting he had been suspended for five days without just cause by the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC). The appeal was assigned to Commission Examiner Anfin J. Wise.

A Zoom hearing was then held on January 13, 2026, by Examiner Wise. The parties made oral argument at the conclusion of the hearing. Later on January 13, Respondent submitted an additional exhibit, which was received. The record was then closed.

On January 21, 2026, Examiner Wise issued a Proposed Decision and Order, modifying the five-day suspension of Chris Christensen by the DOC to a three-day suspension, ordering he be made whole for the difference with interest. No objections to the Proposed Decision were received by the parties by the given deadline of January 26, 2026, and the matter became ripe for Commission consideration on January 27, 2026.

Being fully advised on the premises and having considered the matter, the Commission makes and issues the following:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Chris Christensen (Christensen) is employed by the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC), as a Correctional Officer at Redgranite Correctional Institution (RGCI) and had permanent status in class at the time of his suspension.

2. The DOC is a state agency responsible for the operation of various corrections facilities including RGCI, a medium-security facility located in Redgranite, Wisconsin.

3. On January 18, 2025, Christensen was grossly negligent in his duties as the Restrictive Housing (RH) rounds officer when he missed a security round between 4:49AM and 5:34AM because he was sitting in the Control Bubble leaning back in his chair with his feet propped up on a desk.

Based on the above and foregoing Findings of Fact, the Commission makes and issues the following:

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission has jurisdiction over this appeal pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 230.44 (1)(c).

2. The State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections did not have just cause within the meaning of Wis. Stat. § 230.34(1)(a) to suspend Chris Christensen for five days but did have just cause to suspend him for three days.

Based on the above and foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the Commission makes and issues the following:

ORDER

The five-day suspension of Chris Christensen by the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections is modified to a three-day suspension, and he shall be made whole for the difference with interest.¹

Issued at Madison, Wisconsin, this 6th day of February 2026.

WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

Peter G. Davis, Chairman

¹ See Wis. Admin. Code ERC 94.07.

MEMORANDUM ACCOMPANYING DECISION AND ORDER

Section 230.34(1)(a), Stats., provides in pertinent part the following as to certain employees of the State of Wisconsin:

An employee with permanent status in class ... may be removed, suspended without pay, discharged, reduced in base pay or demoted only for just cause.

Section 230.44(1)(c), Stats., provides that a State employee with permanent status in class:

may appeal a demotion, layoff, suspension, discharge or reduction in base pay to the commission ... if the appeal alleges that the decision was not based on just cause.

Chris Christensen had permanent status in class at the time of his five-day suspension and his appeal alleges that the suspension was not based on just cause.

The State has the burden of proof to establish that Christensen was guilty of the alleged misconduct and whether the misconduct constitutes just cause for the discipline imposed. *Reinke v. Personnel Bd.*, 53 Wis.2d 123 (1971); *Safransky v. Personnel Bd.*, 62 Wis.2d 464 (1974).

Christensen is a Correctional Officer at RGCI. During third shift on January 17 through 18, 2025, 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM, Christensen was assigned as the Restrictive Housing (RH) rounds officer. As the RH rounds officer, he assists in duties in the Restrictive Housing Unit (RHU), but his primary responsibility is to complete security rounds every thirty minutes. There is one other RHU officer on shift, as well as a sergeant. Per post orders, the other third shift RHU officer is responsible for completing a minimum of two security rounds. The sergeant is responsible for ensuring that rounds are completed properly and logged accurately.

During third shift on January 17 through 18, 2025, Christensen completed twelve security rounds, including a round at approximately 4:40 AM and 5:40 AM. The other officer completed only one security round. No round was completed between the 4:40 AM and 5:40 AM round. However, Sgt. Matthew Lane falsely logged that Christensen completed a 5:10 AM round. Between 4:49 AM and 5:34 AM, Sgt. Lane, the other officer, and Christensen remained in the Control Bubble. Christensen was sitting and leaning back in his chair with his feet propped up on a desk.

Redgranite Warden Daisy Chase credibly testified that completion of security rounds is an important and basic function of correctional officers for maintaining the safety and security of the institution and its inmates. Not only does a missed security round create a substantial risk to the safety and security of the institution, but a missed security round can be a matter of life or death for an inmate.

The DOC concluded that a “two-level skip” to a five-day suspension was warranted due to the serious nature of Christensen’s misconduct, specifically that he was grossly negligent in his duties when he missed the 5:10 AM security round and instead was sitting in the Control Bubble leaning back in a chair with his feet propped up on a desk for approximately 45 minutes. The Department also considered that Christensen was a newer employee at the time with about eleven months as an officer, and faulted Christensen for knowingly giving false information about the missed security round.

The record established that Sgt. Lane falsified agency records when he logged the 5:10 AM round, and failed to ensure that all rounds were completed, as required. Sgt. Lane was issued a five-day suspension for falsification and negligence. The record also established that the other officer on duty that night was a probationary employee and was therefore discharged for his misconduct.

Christensen admitted to failing to complete all of his duties as required during his shift on January 17-18, 2025. He also acknowledged that there was a missed security round at 5:10 AM. He explained that he was fifteen hours into a sixteen-hour double shift, and he may have lost track of time. He pointed out that he completed twelve rounds, while the other officer only completed one round. Finally, he credibly maintained that he did not provide false information about the missed security round.

Based on a preponderance of the evidence, as well as his admissions, the Commission finds that Christensen was grossly negligent when he missed the 5:10 AM security round because he was sitting and leaning back in a chair with his feet propped up on a desk for approximately 45 minutes. This gross negligence constituted serious misconduct due to the substantial risk to the safety and security of the institution, staff, and the inmates in his care. Accordingly, we find that DOC had just cause to discipline Christensen for his serious misconduct.

With respect to the allegation that Christensen provided false information about the missed security round, we conclude that there was insufficient evidence to support such a finding.

Turning now to the level of discipline imposed here. When an employee commits serious misconduct, as Christensen did, it logically follows that his discipline can likewise be serious. In fact, DOC routinely discharges employees who engage in serious misconduct, even if the employee has no prior discipline. Here however, the Commission concludes that a “two-level skip” or five-day suspension is excessive given that Sgt. Lane was also issued a five-day suspension for his failures that night. As the sergeant, Lane was the lead worker on duty and therefore held to a higher standard. Additionally, the Commission has rejected the allegation of knowingly providing false information. Under the circumstances, a three-day suspension or a “one-level skip” in discipline meets the just cause standard.

Given the foregoing, it is concluded Christensen’s five-day suspension be modified to a three-day suspension. Christensen shall be made whole for the difference with interest.

Issued at the City of Madison, Wisconsin, this 6th day of February 2026.

WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

Peter G. Davis, Chairman