

STATE OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

KRISTINE GRUETZMACHER, Appellant,

vs.

STATE OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, Respondent.

Case ID: 1.0840

Case Type: PA

DECISION NO. 41311

Appearances:

Sergeant Aldon Lehmann, 509 Harrison St. North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, appearing on behalf of Kristine Gruetzmacher.

David Makovec, Attorney, Department of Administration, 101 East 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 29, 2025, Kristine Gruetzmacher filed an appeal with the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission asserting she had been suspended for one day without just cause by the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections. The matter was assigned to Commission Chairman Peter Davis and then reassigned to Commission Examiner Cara Larson.

A Zoom hearing was held on February 5, 2026, by Examiner Larson. The parties made oral arguments at the conclusion of the hearing. On February 5, 2026, pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 227.46(3)(a), Examiner Larson was granted final authority to issue the Commission's decision.

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

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Kristine Gruetzmacher (Gruetzmacher) is employed by the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) as Nurse Clinician 2 at the Drug Abuse Correction Center and had permanent status in class at the time of her suspension.

2. The DOC is a state agency responsible for the operation of various corrections facilities including the Drug Abuse Correction Center, located in Winnebago, Wisconsin.

3. On May 31, 2025, Gruetzmacher received a call from security staff advising her that an inmate was reporting a possible heart problem. Approximately 28 minutes elapsed between the initial call and Gruetzmacher's face-to-face assessment of the patient. The standard of care required that an inmate reporting possible cardiac symptoms should receive an immediate face-to-face assessment.

4. The DOC suspended Gruetzmacher for one day on September 15, 2025, for the misconduct referenced in Finding of Fact 3.

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 to review this appeal pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 230.44 (1)(c).

2. The State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections had just cause within the meaning of Wis. Stat. § 230.34 (1)(a) to suspend Kristine Gruetzmacher for one day.

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

ORDER

The one-day suspension of Kristine Gruetzmacher by the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections is affirmed.

Issued at Madison, Wisconsin, this 19th day of February 2026.

WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

Electronically signed by: Cara J. Larson

Cara J. Larson, Hearing Examiner

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.

Kristine Gruetzmacher had permanent status in class at the time of her suspension and her appeal alleges that the suspension was not based on just cause.

The State has the burden of proof to establish that Gruetzmacher was guilty of the alleged misconduct and that 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).

The discipline arose from a May 31, 2025, incident in which an inmate in custody reported cardiac-related symptoms to security staff. Gruetzmacher was notified and indicated she would see the individual in approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Approximately 28 minutes elapsed between the initial notification and her face-to-face assessment. During that time, Gruetzmacher distributed medications and took a 15 minute break outside the facility. Although the inmate did not experience a negative medical outcome, DOC supervisory staff testified that reported cardiac symptoms constitute a high-priority medical concern requiring a prompt, in-person assessment.

Gruetzmacher argued that she performed an appropriate triage by telephone, exercised professional clinical judgment, and complied with DOC policies, which do not specify a precise response time. She further emphasized that no harm resulted.

Nursing Supervisor Keith Johnson and Bureau of Health Services Director Dr. Jessica Gross both stated that reports of cardiac symptoms constitute a high-priority medical concern requiring immediate face-to-face evaluation. Both also testified that leaving the facility prior to conducting such an assessment was inconsistent with expected nursing practices and DOC policy. Sergeant Terance Bolden, who reported the inmate's concern to Gruetzmacher stated that she did not ask him to conduct further assessment, ask follow-up medical questions, or provide monitoring instructions after she indicated she would see the inmate in approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

While DOC policies do not establish a precise response time for every medical complaint, the credible testimony established that the applicable standard of care requires immediate and direct assessment of reported cardiac symptoms absent exigent circumstances. Distributing

medications and leaving the facility for a personal break before conducting a face-to-face evaluation was inconsistent with those expectations.

Turning now to a just cause consideration of the level of discipline Gruetzmacher received, she had no prior disciplinary actions within the preceding twelve months. The Department applied its progressive discipline policy and imposed a one-day suspension which is the initial step in the disciplinary schedule. Given the seriousness of failing to promptly assess a potentially developing cardiac complaint, the one-day suspension in line with progressive discipline was reasonable and is therefore affirmed.

Issued at Madison, Wisconsin, this 19th day of February 2026.

WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

Electronically signed by: Cara J. Larson

Cara J. Larson, Hearing Examiner