

STATE OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

SASHA STRAKA, Appellant,

vs.

STATE OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, Respondent.

Case ID: 446.0049

Case Type: PA

DECISION NO. 41532

Appearances:

Sasha L. Straka, 1605 East Wells Street #107, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, appearing on her own behalf.

David G. Makovec, Attorney, Department of Administration, 201 East Wilson Street, 10th Floor, P.O. Box 7864, Madison, Wisconsin, appearing on behalf of the State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

DECISION AND ORDER

On April 21, 2026, Sasha Straka filed an appeal with Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission asserting she had been suspended for one day without just cause by the State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation. The appeal was assigned to Commission Examiner Anfin J. Wise. On September 16, 2025, pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 227.46(3)(a), Examiner Wise was given final authority to issue the Commission's decision.

A Zoom hearing was held on July 15, 2026, by Examiner Wise. DOT made an oral closing argument at the conclusion of the hearing. DOT submitted additional exhibits on July 16, 2026. On July 22, 2026, Straka filed a written closing argument. On July 23, 2026, DOT filed its rebuttal to Straka's closing argument. On July 23, 2026, Straka submitted a response to DOT's rebuttal, whereupon the record was closed.

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

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Sasha Straka is employed by the State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) as a DMV Customer Service Representative Senior at the Prairie du Chien DMV and had permanent status in class at the time of her one-day suspension.

2. In November 2025, Straka's supervisor, Kristina Gaustad, as well as Christian Lyons, the DMV Bureau of Field Services SW Region Manager, gave Straka a written and verbal directive to report to the Platteville DMV on November 26 and December 10, 2025.

3. On November 26 and December 10, 2025, Straka failed to comply with the directive when she did not show up at the Platteville DMV.

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 Transportation had just cause, within the meaning of Wis. Stat. § 230.34(1)(a), to suspend Sasha Straka for one day.

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

ORDER

The one-day suspension of Sasha Straka by the State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation is affirmed.

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

WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

Electronically signed by: Anfin J. Wise

Anfin J. Wise, 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.

Sasha Straka 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 Straka 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).

In November 2025, Straka's supervisor, Kristina Gaustad, gave Straka a written and verbal directive to report to the Platteville DMV on November 26 and December 10, 2025. That directive was reiterated verbally and in writing, to Straka by Christian Lyons, the DMV-Bureau of Field Services SW Region Manager. On November 26 and December 10, 2025, Straka did not report to the Platteville DMV.

In *Reesman v. DOC*, Dec. No. 37301 (WERC, 02/18), the Commission stated:

When a supervisor gives an employee a legitimate order or directive, the employee is supposed to comply with the order or directive and do what they are told whether they like it or not. Employers have a legitimate interest in ensuring that employees follow the directives they are given. When employees fail to follow orders or directives, that conduct is obviously detrimental to the workplace environment. If an employee does not comply with a work order or directive, then their conduct constitutes insubordination, and there can be adverse employment consequences as a result.

Here, Straka argues that her permanent work location is headquartered at the Prairie du Chien DMV and that the DOT does not have the authority to order her to travel and report to an alternative work location. Additionally, her vehicle had broken down, and she did not have a vehicle to travel to Platteville. While the Commission acknowledges Straka's frustration in having to travel about 50 miles to her work assignment, we find that Gaustad's and Lyon's directive to report to the Platteville DMV was a lawful and legitimate work directive that they were empowered to make, and that Straka was required to comply with. Additionally, we conclude that the Department has the authority to assign and require employees to travel to alternative work

locations, even if the location requires a 50-mile commute. Under the circumstances, because Straka failed to comply with the legitimate work directive, misconduct has been established.

Nevertheless, Straka asserts that her discipline should be rejected because she firmly believes that the DOT was obligated to provide her with a State issued vehicle or some sort of alternative mode of transportation for her commute to the Platteville DMV. Straka claimed that the State's travel policies require the DOT to provide her with a State fleet vehicle. However, there is no policy related to State business travel that requires the DOT to provide State employees with a vehicle. Therefore, we reject Straka's argument.

Given the foregoing, the Commission finds that Straka's insubordination and failure to comply with a legitimate work directive to report to the Platteville DMV provides just cause for the one-day suspension imposed by DOT. As the first step in the disciplinary progression schedule, a one-day suspension was not excessive punishment, and it is therefore affirmed.

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

WISCONSIN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

Electronically signed by: Anfin J. Wise

Anfin J. Wise, Examiner