

**BOARD OF CITY SERVICE COMMISSIONERS
CITY OF MILWAUKEE**

IN THE MATTER OF
LAKENA CORNELIUS
V.
CITY OF MILWAUKEE

FINDINGS AND DECISION

This is the written determination of the Board of City Service Commissioners on the administrative appeal hearing in this case. A timely appeal was received from Lakena Cornelius (hereinafter "Appellant") challenging her discharge from the position of Medical Assistant, Milwaukee Health Department (hereinafter "MHD" or "Department") on August 28, 2025.

An administrative appeal hearing was held in hybrid format (both in-person and by video conference) pursuant to Sec. 63.43, Wis. Stats. and City Service Commission Rule XIV, Section 7, on Monday, November 3, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. The witnesses were sworn and all testimony was taken by a Court Reporter.

Appearances:

City Service Commission:	Francis Bock, President Marilyn Miller, Vice President Janet Cleary, Commissioner Steve Smith, Commissioner Heidi Wick Spoerl, Commissioner Jackie Q. Carter, Executive Secretary Kristin Urban, Staffing Services Manager Elizabeth Moore, Administrative Support Specialist
Commission Represented By:	Patrick McClain, Assistant City Attorney
Appellant Represented By:	Herself
Department Represented By:	Lindsay O'Connor, Human Resources Officer, MHD
Witnesses:	Michael Totoraitis, Commissioner of Health, MHD Naomi Jenkins, Sexual and Reproductive Health Dir., MHD Corey McVey, Public Health Nursing Supervisor, MHD Samantha Brennan, Human Resources Analyst, MHD Shakilla Cheeks, Clinic Office Coordinator, MHD James Stewart, Former Colleague of Appellant

Kelli Thomas, Friend of Appellant
Kevin Lyons, Friend of Appellant

ISSUE

The issue is whether or not there was just cause for the action taken by the Department in accordance with sec. 63.43, Stats.

Based upon the evidence in the record, the Commission finds as follows:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The City of Milwaukee Workplace Violence Prevention Policy prohibits “unwelcome or unwanted conduct or behavior that objectively causes a negative impact or disruption to the workplace or results in the erosion of employee morale.”
2. Violations of the policy are punishable by discipline “including suspension; termination; physical removal; fines and/or civil and criminal penalties as provided by law.”
3. The City of Milwaukee’s Anti-Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy prohibits bullying, discrimination, and harassment, whether verbal or physical, arising out of conduct at the workplace.
4. According to the policy, discipline for violations “may not be progressive” and even a first violation may warrant “suspension or discharge.”
5. Appellant was first employed by the city as a Medical Assistant with MHD on August 12, 2019.
6. In November 2024, Appellant received counseling and a coaching session related to a verbal altercation she had with a co-worker while at work.
7. On July 23, 2025, Appellant was scheduled to work at Keenan Health Center, which both houses other MHD employees and provides medical services to the public.
8. After Appellant’s scheduled start time, Appellant sent a text to her supervisor stating “FMLA9:30.”

9. This meant that Appellant was intending to take leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”) and would be late to work.
10. Appellant’s supervisor immediately responded by text, stating “You need to send this before start of day. Handbook says an hour before.”
11. Appellant replied by text, stating “We went through this already do we need to go through it again.”
12. Appellant then immediately sent two more texts stating “FMLA10” and “FMLA10:10.”
13. After this text exchange, Appellant became angry because she believed her supervisor had misapplied the FMLA request procedures.
14. When Appellant arrived at work, she entered the doorway of her supervisor’s office and began yelling.
15. Appellant remained in the supervisor’s doorway while yelling in a loud, aggressive voice and making aggressive hand movements.
16. Appellant’s voice was so loud that it could be heard in the publicly accessible areas of the clinic.
17. An investigation into the incident was initiated.
18. During the investigation, it was discovered that Appellant had previously made statements during staff meetings about having a concealed carry weapon.
19. At the time, the Department had recently experienced a false alarm regarding an active shooter in another MHD office.
20. While there is no evidence that Appellant actually brought a firearm into her workplace, Appellant’s comments made other MHD employees uncomfortable.
21. A pre-discharge hearing was held on August 15, 2025.
22. During the pre-discharge hearing, Appellant acknowledged her awareness that other MHD employees perceived her to be a bully and that her actions made co-workers feel uncomfortable.

23. Despite this awareness, Appellant blamed her co-workers for this perception—stating “I can’t be responsible for other people’s actions,” or words to that effect.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. Appellant was an employee holding a classified position in MHD, the appointing authority within the meaning of Sec. 63.43, Wis. Stats., and the City Service Commission Rules.
2. The Department demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence that Appellant violated City Service Commission Rule XIV, Section 12, Paragraph I by being insubordinate to her supervisor; Rule XIV, Section 12, Paragraph J by exhibiting offensive conduct and using offensive language towards her supervisor; and Rule XIV, Section 12, Paragraph Q by failing to comply with the City of Milwaukee’s Violence Prevention Policy and Anti-Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy.
3. Based on the preponderance of the evidence, the Department did have just cause to discipline Appellant.
4. Based on the preponderance of the evidence, there was just cause to discharge the Appellant.

ORDER

By unanimous vote of the Board, the discharge of Appellant on August 28, 2025 is affirmed.

Dated and signed at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this _____ 2026.

FRANCIS BOCK, PRESIDENT