

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE

DAVONNE BRIDDELL)
)
 Appellant,)
) C.A. No. N25A-05-007 DJB
 v.)
)
 WELLS FARGO BANK N.A. and)
 UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE)
 APPEAL BOARD,)
)
 Appellee.)

Date Submitted: March 4, 2026

Date Decided: June 24, 2026

**Memorandum Opinion on the Decision of the Unemployment Insurance
Appeals Board - AFFIRMED**

Davonne Briddle, *pro se*

Margaret DiBianca, Esquire, Jessica Mazzeo, Esquire, admitted *pro hac vice*, and
Timothy McCarthy, Esquire, admitted *pro hac vice* (argued), Wilmington,
Delaware, attorneys for Wells Fargo Bank, N.A.

BRENNAN, J.

Appellant Davonne Briddell (hereinafter “Briddell”) appeals the denial of her application for unemployment benefits. Following a hearing, the Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board (hereinafter “UIAB”) found Briddell ineligible for unemployment benefits, finding she was terminated from Wells Fargo Bank (hereinafter “Wells Fargo”) for “just cause.” Briddell appealed to this Court and before this Court is Briddell’s Appeal that is now ripe for decision.¹ Upon review, the Board’s decision was free from legal error and supported by substantial evidence. As a result, the decision is **AFFIRMED**.

I. RELEVANT FACTS

Briddell was a Branch Manager at Wells Fargo and worked under the supervision of District Manager, Senior Vice President, Nicole Burrell (hereinafter “Burrell”).² Individuals employed by Wells Fargo are subject to the bank’s Code of Conduct policy and required to complete quarterly training to ensure adherence to that policy.³ Under the policy, “unprofessional behavior” is defined as “behavior that creates an intimidating or offensive work environment” as well as “abusive

¹ Not. of Appeal, *Biddell v. Unemployment Ins. Appeal Bd.*, N25A-05-007 DJB, May 30, 2025 Docket Item (hereinafter “D.I. 1”).

² Def. Ans. Brief, D.I. 24, p. 3.

³ D.I. 24 p. 3. Def. Ans. Brief cites to the Record (D.I. 11) at p. 94 (hereinafter, all Record cites will be noted as “R. at ___.”).

behavior or conduct including verbal abuse, insults, name calling, deliberate attempts to humiliate or demean another, or disrespectful interruptions.”⁴

On July 16, 2024, Wells Fargo conducted Briddell’s mid-year employee review whereupon she received a rating of “inconsistently meets” in the “overall leadership of customer and team member engagement” category.⁵ Briddell’s poor rating stemmed from a series of HR complaints made by employees who expressed concerns about Briddell’s leadership abilities.⁶ Wells Fargo investigated the complaints made and “[Briddell] received a Corrective Action on August 1, 2024.”⁷ The Corrective Action stated the basis of the Action, which included the employee complaints concerning Briddell’s conduct.⁸ The Corrective Action provided that if Briddell failed to “consistently meet and sustain performance at an acceptable level, [Briddell] may be subject to further corrective action, up to and including termination of employment.”⁹

On August 5, 2024, Wells Fargo was informed that an employee who worked for Briddell was resigning because of her conduct, including Briddell having “threaten[ed] retaliation against those employees who provided information that led

⁴ D.I. 24, p. 3, R. at 47, 83.

⁵ D.I. 24, p. 3, R. at 22-24.

⁶ D.I. 24, p. 3, R. at 198-203.

⁷ D.I. 24, p. 3, R. at 26, 29.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

to her Corrective Action.”¹⁰ It was learned on August 6, 2024, that another employee complained that Briddell, “had ‘interrogated’ him” about the reasons for the aforementioned employee’s departure email and that this employee was “not ‘comfortable’ with the conversation.”¹¹ Consequently, Briddell was placed on leave, an investigation was completed, and she was ultimately terminated on September 26, 2024, for “unprofessional conduct and retaliation.”¹²

Upon her termination, Briddell applied for unemployment benefits. Initially, her application was denied following a determination that Briddell was fired for “just cause.”¹³ Briddell challenged that determination to an Appeals Referee, who, on March 5, 2025, reversed the initial decision, found Briddell was terminated without just cause, and thus eligible to receive unemployment benefits.¹⁴ Wells Fargo timely appealed to the Unemployment Insurance Appeal Board (hereinafter “UIAB” or “the Board”), and a hearing was held on April 23, 2025.¹⁵ At that hearing, Wells Fargo brought three witnesses to testify: District Manager Burrell, Salman Malik (“Malik”), and Josef Ares (“Ares”).¹⁶

¹⁰ D.I. 24, p. 4, R. at 61-62.

¹¹ D.I. 24, p. 4, R. at 30.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ D.I. 24, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Briddell v. Wells Fargo*, No. 100007222243, at 1 (UIAB, 2025).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ D.I. 11, R. at 50.

Burrell provided testimony concerning the Wells Fargo Code of Conduct and the violations Wells Fargo alleged Briddell committed.¹⁷ Burrell provided a copy of the February 2025 Wells Fargo Code of Conduct for the Board’s review. Burrell testified that the Code has remained the same for roughly thirty-four (34) years and is simply republished annually to reflect the current date.¹⁸ Burrell testified that Wells Fargo holds an employee conduct training online each quarter and she had no reason to believe that Briddell had not completed the training.¹⁹ Burrell also testified that she did not fire Briddell in person.²⁰

Malik and Ares testified about their negative employee experiences while working under Briddell. Malik started working at Wells Fargo in July 2021, but did not interact with Briddell until July 2023.²¹ Malik was one of the employees to file complaints about Briddell with the District Manager.²² Malik testified that “[Briddell] created a stressful environment in which he dreaded going to work each day.”²³ Further, Malik testified that issues with Briddell continued through August, “including Briddell having yelled at employees in an effort to have employees

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ D.I. 11, R. at 51.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

schedule bathroom breaks, Briddell pulled employees from their breaks; and other instances of Briddell having yelled at employees.”²⁴

Ares was a banker at Wells Fargo who worked under Briddell and testified about his negative and “traumatic” experience working under Briddell.²⁵ Specifically, Ares testified that it felt like “walking on eggshells” around her and she would make comments like “I hired you, I can fire you.”²⁶ Ares testified that Briddell created a work environment in which fellow employees felt anxious and in constant fear of being fired.²⁷ Ares further testified about several instances of being reprimanded in front of customers for “minor mistakes” and disciplined for mistakes made while training.²⁸ On one occasion, Ares was disciplined by Briddell for being late when he arrived at 9:30 a.m. for training that began at 9:30 a.m.²⁹ Ares reported Briddell’s behavior to the employee who was training him, who subsequently had to tell Briddell and the District Manager that Briddell was not to further disrupt Ares’s training.³⁰ Ares further testified that if he ever went to Briddell to address any concerns or issues he would be “penalized for things he did not do.”³¹

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

Upon being questioned by the Board about the timeframe leading up to Briddell’s termination, Ares described the tense work environment and how the team felt extremely anxious, were reluctant to communicate with Briddell, and felt they could not do enough to meet her needs.³² Ares further described how Briddell would hold morning huddles with the team and would use this time to threaten them. Overall, Ares testified that “he feared coming in in the morning.”³³

Wells Fargo argued the testimony established that Briddell’s termination was justified in that she failed to meet the “company standard” and that prior to her firing, “she received progressive discipline in which the corrective action was the final warning.”³⁴ They continued that Briddell had been warned that she may be terminated if she did not correct her behavior, yet failed to do so.³⁵

Briddell denied these allegations and insisted that “her final write-up was her sole write-up.”³⁶ Briddell refuted Ares and Malik’s testimony and offered an email from Ares detailing events that occurred on August 5 and 6, 2024, which was less specific than his testimony.³⁷ Briddell claimed in her testimony that Ares had lied to the Board and was, in fact, late during to the relevant training.³⁸ Briddell told the

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

Board that while she was stern, she denied the allegations against her that she would yell.³⁹ Briddell stated she had records to support all of her claims, but did not bring them to the hearing.⁴⁰

Briddell filed her Notice of Appeal on May 30, 2025.⁴¹ On September 12, 2025, she filed her Opening Brief.⁴² Wells Fargo filed its Answering Brief on October 2, 2025.⁴³ Briddell did not file a Reply brief and the matter proceeded to argument on the papers submitted.⁴⁴ An in person oral argument was held on March 4, 2025.⁴⁵ This matter is now ripe for decision.

II. STANDARD OF REVIEW

On appeal from an administrative board's final order, review is restricted to whether the Board's decision is “free from legal error and supported by substantial evidence.”⁴⁶ Substantial evidence means “such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.”⁴⁷ In reviewing the record to make such a finding, the Court must consider the record in the light most favorable

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ D.I. 1.

⁴² D.I. 18.

⁴³ D.I. 24.

⁴⁴ D.I. 25-27.

⁴⁵ D.I. 31.

⁴⁶ *Volk v. Unemployment Ins. Appeal Bd.*, 2016 WL 241379, at *1 (Del. Super. Jan. 13, 2016) (citing 29 *Del. C.* § 10142(d); *Wilson v. Breakers Hotel & Suites*, 2010 WL 2562214 (Del. Super. June 24, 2010)).

⁴⁷ *Munyan v. DaimlerChrysler Corp.*, 909 A.2d 133, 136 (Del. 2006).

to the prevailing party below.⁴⁸ On appeal, this Court “does not sit as trier of fact with authority to weigh the evidence, determine questions of credibility, and make its own factual findings and conclusions.”⁴⁹

Absent any errors of law, a decision of the Board supported by substantial evidence will be upheld unless the Board abused its discretion.⁵⁰ Abuse of discretion exists only when the conclusions exceed all bounds of reason in view of the circumstances.⁵¹ The Court cannot afford weight to the evidence presented below, nor can it make credibility or actual findings; the Court’s role is limited to a determination of whether the evidence presented below was legally sufficient to support the agency's findings.⁵² “The findings of the Unemployment Insurance Appeal Board as to the facts, if supported by evidence and in the absence of fraud, shall be conclusive, and the jurisdiction of the Court shall be confined to questions of law.”⁵³ “Questions of law are reviewed de novo.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ *General Motors Corp. v. Guy*, Del. Super., C.A. No. 90A-JL-5, Gebelein, J. (Aug. 16, 1991).

⁴⁹ *Glanden v. Land Prep, Inc.*, 918 A.2d 1098, 1100 (Del. 2007) (quoting *Johnson v. Chrysler Corp.*, 213 A.2d 64, 66 (Del. 1965)).

⁵⁰ *Hoffecker v. Lexus of Wilmington*, 2012 WL 341714, at *1 (Del. Feb 1, 2012).

⁵¹ *Person-Gaines v. Pepco Holdings, Inc.*, 981 A.2d 1159, 1161 (Del. 2009).

⁵² *Torres v. MOT Charter Sch.*, 2022 WL 1584508, at *1 (Del. Super. May 19, 2022) (internal citations omitted).

⁵³ *Torres*, 2022 WL 1584508, at *1 (citing 19 *Del. C.* § 3323(a)).

⁵⁴ *Person-Gaines*, 981 A.2d at 1161 (internal citations omitted).

III. ANALYSIS

Briddell's appeal of the denial of unemployment benefits by the UIAB challenges her firing as wrongful termination and contends that Wells Fargo terminated her without just cause. Wells Fargo defends the Board's decision as free from legal error and supported by substantial evidence. Title 19 of the Delaware Code, Section 3315 delineates eligibility for persons seeking unemployment insurance benefits. Under this section, an individual is disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance benefits "for the week in which he was discharged from his work for just cause in connection with his work... ." ⁵⁵ "Just cause" refers to a "wilful or wanton act in violation of either the employer's interest or of the employee's duties or the employee's expected standard of conduct." ⁵⁶ Intent to act in such a way is not required in a finding of wilful or wanton conduct. It is sufficient to show that an employee was, "conscious of his conduct or recklessly indifferent of its consequences... ." ⁵⁷

Briddell claims the UIAB improperly relied on hearsay in its findings and that Wells Fargo's claims regarding her misconduct were unsubstantiated and false. The facts bely this claim. The UIAB's decision was based on Briddell's unsatisfactory

⁵⁵ *Mack v. Unemployment Ins. Appeals Bd.*, 1987 WL 26914, at *1 (Del. Super. Dec. 1, 1987) (citing 19 *Del. C.* § 3315(2)).

⁵⁶ *Id.* (citing *Abex Corp. v. Todd*, 235 A.2d 271 (Del. Super. 1967)).

⁵⁷ *Id.* at *2 (citing *Coleman v. Department of Labor*, 288 A.2d 285 (Del. Super. 1972)).

mid-year review, conduct that led to and followed Briddell’s Corrective Action, and firsthand witness testimony. The UIAB’s decision relied heavily on first-hand witness testimony and was based, in-part, on the direct testimony by employees who worked under Briddell, and who described Briddell’s aggressive managerial tactics, unacceptable conduct, and violations of the Wells Fargo company standard.

Additionally, the evidence presented supported the findings documented in Briddell’s mid-year review and Corrective Action. Briddell is correct that her mid-year review contained some positive feedback, which she used to argue to her advantage before the Board. However, the positive feedback received pertained to her enthusiasm and financial topics – matters unrelated to the allegations of which formed the basis of her termination.⁵⁸ Notably, the mid-year review awarded her a rating of “inconsistently meets” for the area of “leadership and team member engagement.”⁵⁹ The review stated Briddell needed to “lead with a customer and team member centric mindset when making decisions and approached with conflict.”⁶⁰ The review further stated that “[Briddell] tended to be defensive when taking accountability....”⁶¹ The review noted Briddell’s issues with leadership and management style, and stated that Briddell “needed to work on her messaging

⁵⁸ D.I. 11, R. at 53, Ref. Hrg. Employer Ex. 1 at 02.

⁵⁹ D.I. 11, R. at 53-54.

⁶⁰ D.I. 11, R. at 54.

⁶¹ *Id.*

towards her team.”⁶² The review mentioned the customer complaints that had been made about Briddell as well as the internal complaints by other employees.⁶³ Overall, the review explained that Briddell “needed to create an environment where team members felt heard, valued, and respected.”⁶⁴

The Board was also presented with testimony regarding the Wells Fargo investigation into Briddell following her mid-year review. The investigation examined complaints lodged against Briddell, both internal and external, which culminated in the aforementioned Corrective Action issued to Briddell on August 1, 2024. The Board was presented with the Corrective Action, which outlined the investigation’s findings, including Briddell’s objectionable conduct that was the basis of the discipline, and expressly informed Briddell that if she failed to “consistently meet and sustain performance at an acceptable level, [Briddell] may be subject to further corrective action, up to and including termination of employment.”⁶⁵ Thus, Briddell was on notice of the consequences she may face if she did not take immediate action.

Despite being on notice, the Board heard evidence that Wells Fargo received two (2) subsequent concerning reports about Briddell’s conduct. The first of which

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ D.I. 24, p. 4, R. at 26, 29.

occurred on August 5, 2024, four (4) days after the Corrective Action. It was testified to that Wells Fargo was notified by an employee working under Briddell that they were resigning because of her conduct and recent retaliation threats against anyone she identified was a part of the complaints which led to her Corrective Action. The Board also heard testimony that on August 6, 2024, another employee emailed Burrell to inform her that Briddell had interrogated him about the employee who had resigned, which he described as an “uncomfortable” conversation. While in part hearsay, there was sufficient first-hand testimony to permit the Board to consider this evidence.

The Board had ample evidence to find that under Wells Fargo’s Code of Conduct and policy, which defines “unprofessional behavior” as “behavior that creates an intimidating or offensive work environment” as well as “abusive behavior or conduct including verbal abuse, insults, name calling, deliberate attempts to humiliate or demean another, or disrespectful interruptions,”⁶⁶ was violated. Ultimately, Briddell was placed on probation when she received her Corrective Action and expressly informed of her behavior that needed to change to avoid additional consequences or termination. Despite the clear warnings, Briddell continued to engage in conduct that was a direct violation of Wells Fargo’s policy and against company interests. Further, the Board heard testimony that Briddell’s

⁶⁶ D.I. 24, p. 3, R. at 47, 83.

objectionable conduct negatively impacted the Wells Fargo work environment, even after having been warned, as evidenced by the experiences shared by the two Wells Fargo employees working under Briddell.

The UIAB's conclusion that there was just cause for Briddell's termination was based upon her violations of Wells Fargo's Code of Conduct and policy. It is not improper for the Board to rely, in part, on hearsay evidence, as the Board is not bound by the Rules of Evidence.⁶⁷ Briddell's appeal misconstrued the standard of review and asked the Court to make findings based upon the credibility of the evidence presented, which is something the Court cannot do. Consequently, the UIAB's decision is supported by substantial evidence. The Board neither abused its discretion nor committed legal error in making its finding.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons the decision of the Unemployment Insurance Appeal Board is **AFFIRMED**.



Danielle J. Brennan, Judge

⁶⁷ *Bethel v. Board of Educ. Of Capital School District*, 985 A.2d 389 (TABLE), 2009 WL 4545208, *4 (Del. 2009).