

Dismissed after being convicted of procuring

■ ARIANE VILLEMAIRE

In a decision rendered on May 29, 2017,¹ arbitrator Jean-Pierre Lussier confirmed the dismissal of a cashier employed by the Société de transport de Montréal who was convicted of procuring.

The facts

Hired in February 2008, the employee pleaded guilty to charges of procuring in 2014. The victim was a 16 year old minor.

The Société de transport de Montréal ("STM") dismissed the employee on the grounds that the conviction was incompatible with the inherent duties of a cashier.

The STM further claimed that the employee lied when he was hired, stating that he had never been convicted of an offence. In fact, he had been convicted of breaking and entering in 2002.

Charter protection

The *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*² states:

"18.2. No one may dismiss, refuse to hire or otherwise penalize a person in his employment owing to the mere fact that he was convicted of a penal or criminal offence, if the offence was in no way connected with the employment or if the person has obtained a pardon for the offence."

To justify the dismissal, the STM had to establish that there was a connection between the convictions for breaking and entering and procuring on the one hand and the position of cashier on the other.

The decision

The arbitrator held that the employee knowingly lied to the STM when he represented that he had not been convicted of a criminal offence, and that he was fully aware that the statement was false. It was not

up to the employee to decide whether the previous conviction was or was not connected to the employment for which he was applying.

The arbitrator considered that the grounds for dismissal related to the conviction for procuring were sufficient and did not address the issue of whether the lie would have justified the dismissal.

In fact, the arbitrator felt that the conviction for procuring was connected to the position of cashier. In this regard, the arbitrator stated:

[TRANSLATION] "Arbitrators have not hesitated to acknowledge that a sexual offence committed by an STM employee risks tainting the public's trust, thereby establishing the connection between the conviction and the employment."³

(Emphasis added)

The public must be able to have complete confidence in the STM. To allow a cashier convicted of procuring to continue performing his duties would tarnish that relationship of trust and the STM's reputation.

The arbitrator noted that a cashier is regularly in contact with a clientele that can sometimes be vulnerable. This clientele is composed particularly of women, both minors and adults. Minors account for 11% of STM clients. Finally, a cashier is also responsible for ensuring the safety of commuters.

Note that the employee in question had also been acquitted of a series of procuring charges involving a young woman he met in the metro while working as a cashier.

¹ *Société de transport de Montréal c. Syndicat des chauffeurs d'autobus, opérateurs de métro et employés des services connexes au transport de la STM, section locale 1983 (SCFP) (Marco Oviedo Viera)*, 2017 QCTA 630.

² C.Q.L.R., c. C-12.

³ *Société de transport de Montréal c. Syndicat des chauffeurs d'autobus, opérateurs de métro et employés des services connexes au transport de la STM, section locale 1983 (SCFP)*, supra note 1 at par. 31.



The arbitrator therefore concluded that the decision to fire the employee was not unreasonable and dismissed the grievance.

Conclusion

This arbitral award is very interesting because it establishes that an employer who provides transportation services to the public, and who must protect the public's safety during such transportation, is justified in terminating the employment of a person who has committed a sexual offence.

Keep in mind that the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* is a quasi-constitutional law that protects individuals who have been convicted of a penal or criminal offence.

The case law on this issue should be monitored and the circumstances fully evaluated before deciding whether there is truly a connection between the offence and the employment.

ARIANE VILLEMAIRE

514 877-2910

avillemaire@lavery.ca

YOU CAN CONTACT THE MEMBERS OF THE LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT GROUP WITH ANY QUESTIONS CONCERNING THIS NEWSLETTER.

PIERRE-L. BARIBEAU	pbaribeau@lavery.ca	514 877-2965
VALÉRIE BELLE-ISLE, CHRP	vbelleisle@lavery.ca	418 266-3059
DAVE BOUCHARD	dabouchard@lavery.ca	819 346-3411
JEAN BOULET	jboulet@lavery.ca	819 373-4370
ÉLODIE BRUNET, CHRP	ebrunet@lavery.ca	514 878-5422
BRITTANY CARSON	bcarson@lavery.ca	514 877-3027
GENEVIÈVE CHAMBERLAND	gchamberland@lavery.ca	819 346-2562
RAFAËLLE E. CHAMPAGNE	rchampagne@lavery.ca	514 877-2923
NICOLAS COURCY	ncourcy@lavery.ca	819 373-8225
MICHEL DESROSNIERS	mdesrosniers@lavery.ca	514 877-2939
NORMAN A. DIONNE	ndionne@lavery.ca	514 877-3070
CHARLOTTE FORTIN	cfortin@lavery.ca	418 266-3074
SIMON GAGNÉ	sgagne@lavery.ca	514 877-2916
DANIELLE GAUTHIER	dgauthier@lavery.ca	819 346-8073
MICHEL GÉLINAS	mgelinas@lavery.ca	514 877-2984
MARIE-JOSÉE HÉTU	mjhétu@lavery.ca	819 373-4274
MARIE-HÉLÈNE JOLICOEUR	mhjolicoeur@lavery.ca	514 877-2955
NICOLAS JOUBERT	njoubert@lavery.ca	514 877-2918
JOSIANE L'HEUREUX	jlheureux@lavery.ca	514 877-2954
NADINE LANDRY	nlandry@lavery.ca	514 878-5668
CLAUDE LAROSE	clarose@lavery.ca	418 266-3062
MYRIAM LAVALLÉE	mlavallee@lavery.ca	819 373-0339
GUY LAVOIE, CIRC	guy.lavoie@lavery.ca	514 877-3030
GUY LEMAY, CIRC	glemay@lavery.ca	514 877-2966
CARL LESSARD	cllessard@lavery.ca	514 877-2963
JEAN SÉBASTIEN MASSOL, CIRC	jsmassol@lavery.ca	514 877-2919
ZEÏNEB MELLOULI	zmellouli@lavery.ca	514 877-3056
VÉRONIQUE MORIN, CIRC	vmorin@lavery.ca	514 877-3082
JESSICA PARENT	jp Parent@lavery.ca	819 373-4100
CATHERINE PARISEAULT	cpariseault@lavery.ca	514 878-5448
SYLVAIN POIRIER	spoirier@lavery.ca	514 877-2942
CLOÉ POTVIN	cpotvin@lavery.ca	514 877-3051
MARIE-HÉLÈNE RIVERIN	mhriverin@lavery.ca	418 266-3082
ARIANE VILLEMAIRE	avillemaire@lavery.ca	514 877-2910

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