# STATE OF MICHIGAN STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES

# ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:

Claimant

Reg. No: 2009-31207

Issue No: 3002

Case No:

Load No: Hearing Date:

August 26, 2009

Kent County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Suzanne L. Keegstra

# HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on August 26, 2009. The claimant personally appeared and provided testimony, along with her husband,

## **ISSUE**

Did the department properly budget the claimant's Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits beginning in July, 2009?

# FINDINGS OF FACT

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the competent, material and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

1. The claimant completed a Semi-Annual Contact Report (DHS-1046) and turned it in to the department on May 29, 2009. Included with this form was paycheck stubs from (where is employed) and (where is employed).

(Department Exhibit 1-9).

- 2. The department completed a FAP budget to reflect the paycheck stubs submitted with the DHS-1046. The claimants' had a net income (after deductions) of \$2530.00. (Department Exhibit 12 13).
- 3. The net income limit for a FAP group size of three is \$1467.00. (Department Exhibit 12 13)
- 4. The department mailed the claimants a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) that informed the claimants that the FAP benefits would be cancelled effective July 1, 2009 due to excess income.
  - 5. The claimants submitted a hearing request on July 20, 2009.

# CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Food Assistance Program (FAP) (formerly known as the Food Stamp (FS) program) is established by the Food Stamp Act of 1977, as amended, and is implemented by the federal regulations contained in Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the FAP program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3001-3015. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

Department policy states:

#### **INCOME**

## **DEPARTMENT POLICY**

## **All Programs**

The group composition and program budgeting items specify whose income to count. The program budgeting items might also contain program-specific income deductions or disregards.

Income means benefits or payments measured in money. It includes money a person owns even if NOT paid directly such as

stock dividends automatically reinvested and income paid to a representative.

Earned income means income received from another person or organization or from self-employment for duties that were performed for remuneration or profit. Unearned income means all income that is NOT earned income. The item specifies whether the income is earned or unearned.

The amount of income counted may be more than the amount a person actually receives, because it is the amount before any deductions including deductions for taxes and garnishments. The amount before any deductions is called the **gross** amount. PEM, Item 500, p. 1.

## Wages

# **All Programs**

**Wages** are the pay an employee receives from another person or organization. Wages include salaries, tips, commissions, bonuses, severance pay and flexible benefits plan funds.

Count an employee's regular wages paid during a vacation or illness as earned income.

Count a wage advance as earnings when the employer actually pays it. Do NOT count the money withheld to offset the advance.

Count wages held by the employer at the request of the employee. However, wages held as a general practice by the employer are NOT income until actually paid.

**Exception:** Income received in one month that is intended to cover several months (e.g., contractual income) is considered available in each of the months covered by the income.

Count gross wages except as explained in this item for:

- . "EIC"
- . "Flexible Benefits"
- . "Strikers"
- . "Student's Earnings"

PEM, Item 500, p. 15.

# PROSPECTIVE BUDGETING/INCOME CHANGE PROCESSING

#### DEPARTMENT PHILOSOPHY

A group's benefits for a month are based, in part, on a prospective income determination. A "best estimate" of income expected to be received by the group during a specific month is determined and used in the budget computation.

Get input from the client whenever possible to establish this "best estimate" amount. The client's understanding of how income is estimated reinforces reporting requirements and makes the client an active partner in the financial determination process. PEM, Item 505, p. 1.

## **DEPARTMENT POLICY**

# FIP, SDA, CDC and FAP

A group's financial eligibility and monthly benefit amount are determined using:

- actual income (income that was already received), and/or
- **.** prospected income amounts (not received but expected).

Only countable income is included in the determination (see PEM 500).

Each source of income is converted to a standard monthly amount, unless a full month's income will not be received (see Standard Monthly Amount in this item). PEM, Item 505, p. 1.

**Fluctuating income:** Income received on a regular schedule but that varies from check to check, such as a waitress' income whose hours vary each week. PEM, Item 505, p. 1.

#### DETERMINING BUDGETABLE INCOME

## FIP, SDA. CDC, FAP

Determine budgetable income using countable, available income for the benefit month being processed. PEM, Item 505, p. 2.

#### **Past Months**

Use actual gross income amounts received for past month benefits, converting to a standard monthly amount, when appropriate. See Standard Monthly Amount in this item.

*Exception:* Prospective income <u>may</u> be used for past month determinations when:

- income verification was requested and received, and
- payments were received by the client after verifications were submitted, and
- there are no known changes in the income being prospected. PEM, Item 505, p. 2.

## **Current and Future Months**

Prospect income using a "best estimate" of income expected to be received during the month (or already received). Seek input from the client to establish an estimate, whenever possible. PEM, Item 505, p. 2.

To prospect income, you will need to know:

- the type of income and the frequency it is received (e.g., weekly),
- . the day(s) of the week paid,
- . the date(s) paid, and
- the gross income amount received or expected to be received on each pay date. PEM, Item 505, p. 2.

#### **BUDGETING INCOME**

Use the following guidelines to budget income.

# **Non-Child Support Income**

Using Past Income

Use past income to prospect income for the future unless changes are expected:

. Use income from the <u>past 30 days</u> if it appears to accurately reflect what is expected to be received in the benefit month.

**Note:** The 30-day period used can begin up to 30 days before the interview date or the date the information was requested.

**Discard** a pay from the past 30 days if it is unusual and does not reflect the normal, expected pay amounts. Document which pay is being discarded and why. For example, the client worked overtime for one week and it is not expected to recur.

- . Use income from the <u>past 60 or 90 days</u> for fluctuating or irregular income, if:
  - .. the past 30 days is not a good indicator of future income, and

the fluctuations of income during the past 60 or 90 days

appear to accurately reflect the income that is expected to be received in the benefit month.

**Note:** The 60 or 90-day period used can begin up to 60 or 90 days before the interview date or the date the information was requested. PEM, Item 505, pp. 5-6.

## **Standard Monthly Amount**

Stable and Fluctuating Income

A standard monthly amount must be determined for each income source used in the budget.

Convert stable and fluctuating income that is received more often than monthly to a standard monthly amount. Use one of the following methods:

- . Multiply weekly income by 4.3.
- . Multiply amounts received every two weeks by 2.15.
- . Add amounts received twice a month.

This conversion takes into account fluctuations due to the number of scheduled pays in a month.

**Exception:** Do <u>not</u> convert income for the month income starts or stops if a full month's income is not expected in that month. Use

actual income received or income expected to be received in these months. PEM, Item 505, p. 7.

#### INCOME DEDUCTIONS

# FIP and SDA Only

Income deductions are available at both the member and the group level. Apply deductions in the order they are presented in this item. PEM, Item 518, p. 4.

# **Earned Income Disregard**

Deduct \$200 from each person's countable earnings. Then deduct an additional 20% of each person's remaining earnings. The total disregard cannot exceed countable earnings. Apply this disregard separately to each program group member's earned income. PEM, Item 518, p. 4.

A non-categorically eligible, non-SDV FS group must have income below the gross and net income limits. PEM, Item 550, p. 1.

Use **only** available, countable income to determine eligibility. PEM 500 defines countable income. PEM 505 defines available income and income change processing. This item describes income budgeting policy. PEM, Item 550, p. 1.

**Always** calculate income on a calendar month basis to determine eligibility and benefit amounts. Use income from a month specified in this item for the benefit month being considered.

Budget the entire amount of earned and unearned countable income. Gross countable earned income is reduced by a 20% earned income deduction. Every case is allowed the standard deduction shown in RFT 255. PEM, Item 550, p. 1.

## **Housing Expenses**

Housing expenses include rent, mortgage, a second mortgage, home equity loan, required condo or maintenance fees, lot rental or other payments including interest leading to ownership of the shelter occupied by the FAP group.

The expense must be a continuing one. Payments that exceed the normal monthly obligation are **not** deductible as a shelter expense unless the payment is necessary to prevent eviction or foreclosure, **and** it has **not** been allowed in a previous FAP budget. Additional

expenses for optional charges, i.e., carport, pets, etc. are **not** allowed. PEM, Item 554, p. 9.

## MANDATORY HEAT AND UTILITY STANDARD

# **Heat Separate from Housing Costs**

A FAP group which has a heat expense or contributes to the heat separate from rent, mortgage or condominium /maintenance payments, must use the Heat and Utility Standard. This standard covers all heat and utility costs except **actual utility expenses**, i.e. installation fees, etc. (See Actual Utilities in this item.) Do **not** prorate the Heat and Utility Standard even if the heat expense is shared.

FAP groups that qualify for the Heat and Utility Standard **do not** receive any other individual utility standards. PEM, Item 554, p. 11.

When determining eligibility for FAP benefits, the household's total income must be evaluated. All earned and unearned income of each household member must be included unless specifically excluded. PEM 500. The FAP program provides a deduction from earned income of 20% and a deduction for the cost of child care when necessary to enable a FAP household member to work. A standard deduction from income of \$135 is allowed. PEM 500 and 554; Program Reference Manual, Table 255; 7 CFR 273.2.

In this case, the Administrative Law Judge has reviewed the FAP budget and finds that the department properly computed the claimant's net income. The federal regulations at 7 CFR 273.10 provide standards for the amount of a household's benefits. The department in compliance with the federal regulations has prepared issuance tables which are set forth at Program Reference Manual, Table 260. The issuance table provides that a household with household size and net income of the claimant is not eligible for a FAP allotment. The monthly net income limit for FAP groups with a group size of three is \$1467. The claimants' income of

2009-31207/SLK

\$2530 does exceed the allowable amount. RFT 250. Thus, the department properly determined

that the claimants' were ineligible for FAP benefits due to excess income.

It is noted that the claimants' testified that has been laid off and is now

receiving unemployment. The department advised that the claimants have re-applied for FAP

benefits now that their circumstances have changed. Thus, the claimants may not be eligible for

FAP benefits as their income has decreased. The department will process the claimants' recent

application and provide notice to them of the results.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions

of law, decides that the department properly budgeted the claimant's FAP benefits beginning

July, 2009.

Accordingly, the department's actions are UPHELD. SO ORDERED.

Suzanne L. Keegstra Administrative Law Judge for Ismael Ahmed, Director Department of Human Services

Date Signed: October 22, 2009

Date Mailed: October 26, 2009

**NOTICE:** Administrative Hearings may order a rehearing or reconsideration on either its own motion or at the request of a party within 30 days of the mailing date of this Decision and Order. Administrative Hearings will not order a rehearing or reconsideration on the Department's motion where the final decision cannot be implemented within 60 days of the filing of the

original request.

9

# 2009-31207/SLK

The Claimant may appeal the Decision and Order to Circuit Court within 30 days of the receipt of the Decision and Order or, if a timely request for rehearing was made, within 30 days of the receipt date of the rehearing decision.

