

STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES

ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF: [REDACTED]

Claimant

Reg. No: 2009-17549
Issue No: 1038
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
May 13, 2009
Wayne 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 May 13, 2009. The claimant personally appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the department properly terminate the claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits for Work First/ Jobs, Education and Training (WF/JET) noncompliance in March, 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 was determined to be a mandatory WF/JET participant for 20 hours weekly.
2. The claimant was mailed a Work First/Jobs, Education and Training Appointment Notice (DHS-4785) on February 5, 2009, requiring the claimant to attend WF/JET on February 9, 2009 (Department Exhibit #1).

3. Although the department did not provide any of the WF/JET case notes, the department representative testified that the claimant's alleged noncompliance happened when she left WF/JET and did not return on February 25, 2009.

4. The claimant was mailed a Notice of Noncompliance (DHS-2444) on March 16, 2009, scheduling a triage appointment on March 20, 2009. The Notice of Noncompliance simply indicates "non-compliance" for the description of how the claimant did not comply and lists the date of February 24, 2009, as the date of noncompliance (Department Exhibit #2).

5. The claimant did attend the triage appointment. The department found no good cause for the claimant's alleged noncompliance (Department Exhibit #4).

6. The department did not offer the claimant the opportunity to sign the First Noncompliance Letter (DHS-754) to remain in the WF/JET program.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Family Independence Program (FIP) was established pursuant to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193, 8 USC 601, *et seq.* The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the FIP program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3101-3131. The FIP program replaced the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program effective October 1, 1996. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

Department policy states:

DEPARTMENT PHILOSOPHY

FIP

DHS requires clients to participate in employment and self-sufficiency-related activities and to accept employment when offered. Our focus is to assist clients in removing barriers so they can participate in activities which lead to self-sufficiency. However, there are consequences for a client who refuses to participate, without good cause.

The goal of the FIP penalty policy is to obtain client compliance with appropriate work and/or self-sufficiency-related assignments and to ensure that barriers to such compliance have been identified and removed. The goal is to bring the client into compliance.

Noncompliance may be an indicator of possible disabilities. Consider further exploration of any barriers.

DEPARTMENT POLICY

FIP

A Work Eligible Individual (WEI), see PEM 228, who fails, without good cause, to participate in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, must be penalized.

See PEM 233B for the Food Assistance Program (FAP) policy when the FIP penalty is closure. For the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) penalty policy, see PEM 233C. PEM 233A, p. 1.

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH EMPLOYMENT AND/OR SELF-SUFFICIENCY-RELATED ACTIVITIES

As a condition of eligibility, all WEIs and non-WEIs must work or engage in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities. Noncompliance of applicants, recipients, or member adds means doing any of the following without good cause:

- . Failing or refusing to:
 - .. Appear and participate with the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Program or other employment service provider.
 - .. Complete a Family Automated Screening Tool (FAST), as assigned as the first step in the FSSP process.
 - .. Develop a Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or a Personal Responsibility Plan and Family Contract (PRPFC).

- .. Comply with activities assigned to on the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or PRPFC.
- .. Appear for a scheduled appointment or meeting.
- .. Participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities.
- .. Accept a job referral.
- .. Complete a job application.
- .. Appear for a job interview (see the exception below).
- . Stating orally or in writing a definite intent not to comply with program requirements.
- . Threatening, physically abusing or otherwise behaving disruptively toward anyone conducting or participating in an employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activity.
- . Refusing employment support services if the refusal prevents participation in an employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activity. PEM 233A, pp. 1-2.

GOOD CAUSE FOR NONCOMPLIANCE

Good cause is a valid reason for noncompliance with employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities that are based on factors that are beyond the control of the noncompliant person. A claim of good cause must be verified and documented for member adds and recipients. Document the good cause determination on the DHS-71, Good Cause Determination and the FSSP under the “Participation and Compliance” tab.

See “School Attendance” PEM 201 for good cause when minor parents do not attend school.

Employed 40 Hours

Client Unit

Good cause includes the following:

- . The person is working at least 40 hours per week on average and earning at least state minimum wage.
- . The client is physically or mentally unfit for the job or activity, as shown by medical evidence or other reliable

information. This includes any disability-related limitations that preclude participation in a work and/or self-sufficiency-related activity. The disability-related needs or limitations may not have been identified or assessed prior to the noncompliance.

Illness or Injury

The client has a debilitating illness or injury, or an immediate family member's illness or injury requires in-home care by the client.

Reasonable Accommodation

The DHS, employment services provider, contractor, agency, or employer failed to make reasonable accommodations for the client's disability or the client's needs related to the disability. PEM 233A, pp. 3-4.

No Child Care

The client requested Child Day Care Services (CDC) from DHS, the MWA, or other employment services provider prior to case closure for noncompliance and CDC is needed for a CDC-eligible child, but none is appropriate, suitable, affordable and within reasonable distance of the client's home or work site.

- . **Appropriate.** The care is appropriate to the child's age, disabilities and other conditions.
- . **Reasonable distance.** The total commuting time to and from work and child care facilities does not exceed three hours per day.
- . **Suitable provider.** The provider meets applicable state and local standards. Also, providers (e.g., relatives) who are NOT registered/licensed by the DHS Office of Child and Adult Services must meet DHS enrollment requirements for day care aides or relative care providers. See PEM 704.
- . **Affordable.** The child care is provided at the rate of payment or reimbursement offered by DHS.

No Transportation

The client requested transportation services from DHS, the MWA, or other employment services provider prior to case closure and reasonably priced transportation is not available to the client.

Illegal Activities

The employment involves illegal activities.

Discrimination

The client experiences discrimination on the basis of age, race, disability, gender, color, national origin, religious beliefs, etc. PEM 233A, p. 4.

Unplanned Event or Factor

Credible information indicates an unplanned event or factor which likely prevents or significantly interferes with employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities. Unplanned events or factors include, but are not limited to the following:

- . Domestic violence.
- . Health or safety risk.
- . Religion.
- . Homelessness.
- . Jail.
- . Hospitalization.

Comparable Work

The client quits to assume employment comparable in salary and hours. The new hiring must occur before the quit.

Long Commute

Total commuting time exceeds:

- . Two hours per day, NOT including time to and from child care facilities, **or**
- . Three hours per day, including time to and from child care facilities. PEM 233A, pp.4-5.

NONCOMPLIANCE PENALTIES FOR ACTIVE FIP CASES AND MEMBER ADDS

The penalty for noncompliance without good cause is FIP closure. Effective April 1, 2007, the following minimum penalties apply:

- . For the first occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for 3 calendar months unless the client is excused from the noncompliance as noted in "First Case Noncompliance Without Loss of Benefits" below.

- . For the second occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for 3 calendar months.
- . For the third and subsequent occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for 12 calendar months.
- . The penalty counter also begins April 1, 2007 regardless of the previous number of noncompliance penalties.

TRIAGE

JET participants will not be terminated from a JET program without first scheduling a “triage” meeting with the client to jointly discuss noncompliance and good cause. Locally coordinate a process to notify the MWA case manager of triage meetings including scheduling guidelines.

Clients can either attend a meeting or participate in a conference call if attendance at the triage meeting is not possible. If a client calls to reschedule an already scheduled triage meeting, offer a phone conference at that time. Clients must comply with triage requirement within the negative action period.

When a phone triage is conducted for a first noncompliance and the client agrees to comply, complete the DHS-754, First Noncompliance Letter, as you would complete in a triage meeting. Note in the client signature box “Client Agreed by Phone”. Immediately send a copy of the DHS-754 to the client and phone the JET case manager if the compliance activity is to attend JET.

Determine good cause based on the best information available during the triage and prior to the negative action date. Good cause may be verified by information already on file with DHS or MWA.

If the FIS, JET case manager, or MRS counselor do not agree as to whether “good cause” exists for a noncompliance, the case must be forwarded to the immediate supervisors of each party involved to reach an agreement.

DHS must be involved with all triage appointment/phone calls due to program requirements, documentation and tracking.

Note: Clients not participating with JET must be scheduled for a “triage” meeting between the FIS and the client. This does not include applicants. PEM 233A, p. 7.

Good Cause Established

If the client establishes good cause within the negative action period, do **NOT** impose a penalty. See “Good Cause for Noncompliance” earlier in this item. Send the client back to JET, if applicable, after resolving transportation, CDC, or other factors which may have contributed to the good cause. Do not enter a new referral on ASSIST. Enter the good cause reason on the DHS-71 and on the FSSP under the “Participation and Compliance” tab.

Good Cause NOT Established

If the client does NOT provide a good cause reason within the negative action period, determine good cause based on the best information available. If no good cause exists, allow the case to close. If good cause is determined to exist, delete the negative action. PEM 233A, pp. 10-11.

Department policy indicates that noncompliance with WF/JET program requirements includes failure to appear and participate with the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Program or other employment service provider and failing to participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities. PEM 233A.

The department provides little evidence regarding the claimant’s alleged noncompliance. The evidence the department does offer is contradictory. The Notice of Noncompliance (DHS-2444), which is supposed to give the claimant notice of how she was noncompliant, simply states “non-compliance” in the section that explains how the claimant was noncompliant. The date listed for the noncompliance is February 24, 2009. The department representative testified that the date of the claimant’s noncompliance was February 25, 2009 and that she was noncompliant because she left WF/JET and did not return. The department did not provide any of the WF/JET case notes which might have provided some documentation on the alleged noncompliance.

In this case, according to department testimony, the claimant was required to participate in 20 hours each week. Therefore, if the claimant did not attend WF/JET for one day, it would

not necessarily equate to noncompliance as the claimant only is required to participate for 20 hours.

However, even if this Administrative Law Judge gives the department the benefit of the doubt, the claimant provided documentation of her absence to the department and the absence should not have been deemed noncompliance. The claimant testified that she was in a methadone treatment program for a prescription drug addiction that had stemmed from a car accident, through [REDACTED]. The claimant further testified that her counselors at the clinic had sent correspondence and telephoned WF/JET on many occasions to attempt to accommodate her WF/JET schedule with her clinic appointments. In fact, the claimant submitted two different letters into evidence from the [REDACTED] addressed to the claimant's DHS worker, which showed the department was aware of the claimant's required participation with the clinic. The department representative admitted that the letters had been received by the department.

Department policy indicates that the goal of the WF/JET program is to assist clients in removing barriers so they can participate in activities which lead to self-sufficiency. PEM 233A. In this case, the claimant clearly had a barrier that was being addressed by the clinic. WF/JET should have made attempts to accommodate the claimant's attendance with the clinic. The department was provided information from the [REDACTED] and was even told the clinic would change the claimant's hours for her treatment if it was necessary. However, the department didn't incorporate the treatment into her WF/JET requirements or even attempt to accommodate the requirements.

It is also noted, while it will not be determinative to this decision, the claimant was not offered the opportunity to sign the First Noncompliance Letter (DHS-754), which policy indicates shall be offered at the time of the first noncompliance. PEM 233A. The department

testified that this was the claimant's first incidence of alleged noncompliance and admitted that the claimant had not been offered the DHS-754 as required by policy.

However, this is not determinative to the outcome of this case as this Administrative Law Judge does not find any instance of noncompliance committed by the claimant as the department has not shown the claimant was noncompliant.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department improperly determined that the claimant had been noncompliant with WF/JET program requirements and improperly determined the claimant's FIP benefits should be terminated due to WF/JET noncompliance.

Accordingly, the department's actions are REVERSED.

The department shall:

1. Reinstatement of the claimant's FIP benefits and issue any retroactive benefits that the claimant is entitled to.
2. Refer the claimant back to WF/JET for participation, taking into consideration any required participation with [REDACTED].

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

Date Signed: May 19, 2009

Date Mailed: May 20, 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 90 days of the filing of the original request.

2009-17549/SLK

The Claimant may appeal the Decision and Order to Circuit Court within 30 days of the mailing 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.

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