

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: 2009-8054

Issue No: 2009; 4031

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

March 25, 2009

Ingham County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Ivona Rairigh

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 March 25 , 2009. Claimant personally appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the Department of Human Services (the department) properly deny claimant's application for Medical Assistance (MA-P), retroactive MA-P, and State Disability Assistance (SDA)?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

(1) On July 8, 2008, claimant filed an application for Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance benefits alleging disability.

(2) On October 20, 2008, the Medical Review Team denied claimant's application stating that claimant could perform other work.

(3) On October 23, 2008, the department caseworker sent claimant notice that his application was denied.

(4) On November 24, 2008, claimant filed a request for a hearing to contest the department's negative action.

(5) On January 7, 2009, the State Hearing Review Team again denied claimant's application stating claimant was capable of performing other work, namely light work per 20 CFR 416.967(b), under Vocational Rule 202.21.

(6) Claimant is a 46 year-old man whose birth date is [REDACTED] Claimant is 5' 11" tall and weighs 175 pounds, after gaining 20 pounds in the last 6 months due to back problems that prevent him from moving around as much as he used to.

(7) Claimant has a high school diploma and one semester of college, and is a welder by trade. Claimant can read, write and do basic math.

(8) Claimant states that he last worked in November, 2007 as a lead welder and fabricator, job that lasted him 1 ½ years and from which he was laid off due to lack of work. Claimant has also owned his own business, a welding and fabrication shop, since the 1980's and in 2002 to 2003. Claimant also worked as a welder for another company from 2003 to 2006.

(9) Claimant testified that he collected Unemployment Compensation Benefits (UCB) until November, 2008, that he now receives UCB again starting in January, 2009 due to an extension, and that he has 8 weeks left to collect on this extension.

(10) Claimant lives with his wife in a rental house. Claimant's wife has terminal cancer and claimant is her caretaker.

(11) Claimant alleges as disabling impairments a ruptured disc in his back for which he had surgery in [REDACTED]

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by Title XIX of the Social Security Act and is implemented by Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the MA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program which provides financial assistance for disabled persons is established by 2004 PA 344. The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3151-400.3180. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

Pursuant to Federal Rule 42 CFR 435.540, the Department of Human Services uses the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) policy in determining eligibility for disability under the Medical Assistance program. Under SSI, disability is defined as:

...the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.... 20 CFR 416.905

A set order is used to determine disability. Current work activity, severity of impairments, residual functional capacity, past work, age, or education and work experience is reviewed. If there is a finding that an individual is disabled or not disabled at any point in the review, there will be no further evaluation. 20 CFR 416.920.

If an individual is working and the work is substantial gainful activity, the individual is not disabled regardless of the medical condition, education and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(c).

If the impairment or combination of impairments does not significantly limit physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, it is not a severe impairment(s) and disability does not exist. Age, education and work experience will not be considered. 20 CFR 416.920.

Statements about pain or other symptoms do not alone establish disability. There must be medical signs and laboratory findings which demonstrate a medical impairment.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...Medical reports should include –

- (1) Medical history.
- (2) Clinical findings (such as the results of physical or mental status examinations);
- (3) Laboratory findings (such as blood pressure, X-rays);
- (4) Diagnosis (statement of disease or injury based on its signs and symptoms).... 20 CFR 416.913(b).

In determining disability under the law, the ability to work is measured. An individual's functional capacity for doing basic work activities is evaluated. If an individual has the ability to perform basic work activities without significant limitations, he or she is not considered disabled. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv).

Basic work activities are the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. Examples of these include --

- (1) Physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling;
- (2) Capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking;
- (3) Understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions;

- (4) Use of judgment;
- (5) Responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations; and
- (6) Dealing with changes in a routine work setting. 20 CFR 416.921(b).

Medical findings must allow a determination of (1) the nature and limiting effects of your impairment(s) for any period in question; (2) the probable duration of the impairment; and (3) the residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Medical evidence may contain medical opinions. Medical opinions are statements from physicians and psychologists or other acceptable medical sources that reflect judgments about the nature and severity of the impairment(s), including your symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, what an individual can do despite impairment(s), and the physical or mental restrictions. 20 CFR 416.927(a)(2).

All of the evidence relevant to the claim, including medical opinions, is reviewed and findings are made. 20 CFR 416.927(c).

The Administrative Law Judge is responsible for making the determination or decision about whether the statutory definition of disability is met. The Administrative Law Judge reviews all medical findings and other evidence that support a medical source's statement of disability.... 20 CFR 416.927(e).

A statement by a medical source finding that an individual is "disabled" or "unable to work" does not mean that disability exists for the purposes of the program. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

When determining disability, the federal regulations require that several considerations be analyzed in sequential order. If disability can be ruled out at any step, analysis of the next step is not required. These steps are:

1. Does the client perform Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA)? If yes, the client is ineligible for MA. If no, the analysis continues to Step 2. 20 CFR 416.920(b).
2. Does the client have a severe impairment that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more or result in death? If no, the client is ineligible for MA. If yes, the analysis continues to Step 3. 20 CFR 416.920(c).
3. Does the impairment appear on a special listing of impairments or are the client's symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings at least equivalent in severity to the set of medical findings specified for the listed impairment? If no, the analysis continues to Step 4. If yes, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.290(d).
4. Can the client do the former work that he/she performed within the last 15 years? If yes, the client is ineligible for MA. If no, the analysis continues to Step 5. 20 CFR 416.920(e).
5. Does the client have the Residual Functional Capacity (RFC) to perform other work according to the guidelines set forth at 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Sections 200.00-204.00? If yes, the analysis ends and the client is ineligible for MA. If no, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.920(f).

At Step 1, claimant is not engaged in substantial gainful activity and testified that he has not worked since November, 2007. Claimant however, also testified that he had received UCB until November, 2008, and that he is now again collecting such benefits due to an extension. In order for the claimant to be eligible for UCB, he must be available for work. This fact alone could result in claimant being disqualified from receiving disability at Step 1.

At Step 2, claimant has the burden of proof of establishing that he has a severely restrictive physical or mental impairment that has lasted or is expected to last for duration of at least 12 months.

The medical evidence on the record consists of a Medical Examination Report completed on [REDACTED] (Department's Exhibit I, pages 3 and 4). This report indicates that claimant has a herniated L4-L5 disc and sciatica, but that his condition is stable. Claimant can

frequently lift 20 lbs., stand and/or walk about 6 hours in an 8-hour workday, and sit less than 6 hours in an 8-hour workday. Claimant has no limitations as far as using his extremities for repetitive actions, or for operation of foot/leg controls. Claimant has no mental limitations, and can meet his needs in the home. Same doctor completed a Medical Needs form on September 24, 2008, stating that the claimant does not have a medical need for assistance with any of the personal care activities that he cannot work at his usual occupation for 6 months, but can do other work with limitations (Department's Exhibit I, page 15).

Claimant testified that he does not have a driver's license currently due to unpaid traffic tickets, but that his daughter takes him to do the grocery shopping, that he cooks every day, that he performs household chores such as vacuuming, laundry, dishes, mopping etc., and that his days are spent taking care of his ill wife. Claimant also testified that his back problems are hereditary, and that he hurt his back again recently when his wife fell and he had to pick her up. Claimant also states that he is in pain all the time from his back but that the pain is less with medications. Claimant takes Vicodin 3 times per day, muscle relaxer but not often as he must take care of his wife, and an anxiety pill as of a week ago due to stress from his wife's illness.

It is apparent that the claimant does have some issues with his back and that his personal situation is difficult due to his wife's illness. However, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the medical record combined with claimant's own hearing testimony about his physical and mental condition is insufficient to establish that claimant has a severely restrictive physical or mental impairment. For these reasons, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant has failed to meet his burden of proof at Step 2. Claimant must be denied benefits at this step based upon his failure to meet the evidentiary burden.

If claimant had not been denied at Step 2, the analysis would proceed to Step 3 where the medical evidence of claimant's condition does not give rise to a finding that he would meet a statutory listing in the code of federal regulations.

At Step 4, if claimant had not already been denied at Step 2, the Administrative Law Judge would have to deny him again based upon his ability to perform past relevant work. Claimant's past relevant work was welding and fabrication, and he has performed such work until November, 2007, when he was laid off from this job. Claimant has received UCB and to do so he must state that he is available for work. Claimant's own doctor states that he will be able to return to such work within 6 months, and this statement is on the Medical Needs form completed in September, 2008. Finding that the claimant is unable to permanently perform work in which he has engaged in in the past cannot therefore be reached and the claimant is denied from receiving disability at Step 4.

The Administrative Law Judge will continue to proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine whether or not claimant has the residual functional capacity to perform other jobs.

At Step 5, the burden of proof shifts to the department to establish that claimant does not have residual functional capacity.

The residual functional capacity is what an individual can do despite limitations. All impairments will be considered in addition to ability to meet certain demands of jobs in the national economy. Physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements and other functions will be evaluated.... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

To determine the physical demands (exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium and heavy. These terms have the same

meaning as they have in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, published by the Department of Labor... 20 CFR 416.967.

Sedentary work. Sedentary work involves lifting no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. 20 CFR 416.967(a).

Light work. Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 10 pounds. Even though the weight lifted may be very little, a job is in this category when it requires a good deal of walking or standing, or when it involves sitting most of the time with some pushing and pulling of arm or leg controls.... 20 CFR 416.967(b).

Medium work. Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. If someone can do medium work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary and light work. 20 CFR 416.967(c).

Heavy work. Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds. If someone can do heavy work, we determine that he or she can also do medium, light, and sedentary work. 20 CFR 416.967(d).

Claimant has submitted insufficient objective medical evidence that he lacks the residual functional capacity to perform at least light work. Claimant's own doctor states in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] that the claimant can lift 20 lbs. frequently and that he does not have substantial limitations pertaining to walking and standing. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a younger individual such as claimant (age 46), with even limited education and unskilled or no work

history who can perform light work is not considered disabled pursuant to Medical-Vocational Rule 201.18.

The claimant has not presented the required competent, material, and substantial evidence which would support a finding that the claimant has an impairment or combination of impairments which would significantly limit the physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.920(c). Although the claimant has cited medical problems, the clinical documentation submitted by the claimant is not sufficient to establish a finding that the claimant is disabled. There is no objective medical evidence to substantiate the claimant's claim that the alleged impairment(s) are severe enough to reach the criteria and definition of disabled. The claimant is not disabled for the purposes of the Medical Assistance disability (MA-P) program.

The department's Program Eligibility Manual contains the following policy statements and instructions for caseworkers regarding the State Disability Assistance program: to receive State Disability Assistance, a person must be disabled, caring for a disabled person or age 65 or older. PEM, Item 261, page 1. Because the claimant does not meet the definition of disabled under the MA-P program and because the evidence of record does not establish that claimant is unable to work for a period exceeding 90 days, the claimant does not meet the disability criteria for State Disability Assistance benefits either.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department has appropriately established on the record that it was acting in compliance with department policy when it denied claimant's application for Medical Assistance, retroactive Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance benefits. The claimant should be able to perform a wide range of at least light work even with his alleged impairments. The department has established its case by a preponderance of the evidence.

Accordingly, the department's decision is AFFIRMED, and it is SO ORDERED.

/s/

Ivona Rairigh
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: April 3, 2009

Date Mailed: April 6, 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.

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.

IR [REDACTED]

cc:

[REDACTED]