

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: 2010-30612
Issue No: 1038
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
June 24, 2010
Crawford County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Gary F. Heisler

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 June 24, 2010. Claimant appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the Department of Human Services properly sanction Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) case for failure to participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

- (1) Claimant was an ongoing recipient of Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits.
- (2) On March 19, 2010, Claimant's case transferred to [REDACTED] Claimant

was going to be referred to the Michigan Works Agency/Jobs Education and Training Program (JET) when it was discovered there was a recorded non-compliance which had not been determined.

(3) On March 30, 2010, Claimant was sent a Notice of Non-Compliance (DHS-2444). The notice scheduled a triage meeting for April 6, 2010.

(4) On April 6, 2010, Claimant attended the triage meeting. The Department determined there was no good cause for Claimant's failure to participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities. Claimant was offered a First Non-Compliance Letter (DHS-754). Claimant marked that she did not agree with the decision and requested a hearing.

(5) On April 7, 2010, Claimant was mailed a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) stating her Family Independence Program (FIP) case would be sanctioned.

(6) On April 9, 2010, Claimant met with Department staff again and decided to accept the first non-compliance test. Claimant marked the agreement box, initialed, and dated the First Non-Compliance Letter (DHS-754). Claimant was given a Work First/Jobs Education and Training Appointment Notice (DHS-4785 form) which stated she must attend on April 13, 2010.

(7) On April 12, 2010, at 3:10 pm, Claimant called and left a phone message for her Department case worker. The message stated that Claimant had received the Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605).

(8) On April 13, 2010, at 9:00 am, Claimant did not attend the Michigan Works Agency/Jobs Education and Training Program (JET). At 11:01 am Claimant called and left a phone message for her Department case worker. The message stated that Claimant had received

a Verification Checklist (DHS Form 3503) sent to her. Claimant made no mention of being ill or not attending the Michigan Works Agency/Jobs Education and Training Program (JET).

(9) On April 14, 2010, Claimant went to the Michigan Works Agency/Jobs Education and Training Program (JET) and had her Work First/Jobs Education and Training Appointment Notice (DHS-4785 form) stamped. Claimant then came to the Department office to get her JET appointment rescheduled. The Department determined that Claimant had not met her compliance test and the sanction should be applied. Claimant submitted a request for hearing.

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 (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) 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 Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

Department policy provides the following guidance for case workers. The Department's policies are available on the internet through the Department's website.

FAILURE TO MEET EMPLOYMENT AND/OR SELSUFFICIENCY-RELATED REQUIREMENTS: FIP

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

All Work Eligible Individual (WEI) and adult non-WEIs (except ineligible grantees, clients deferred for lack of child care (DC) and disqualified aliens), see [BEM 228](#), who fail, without good cause, to participate in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, must be penalized.

Depending on the case situation, penalties include the following:

- Delay in eligibility at application.
- Ineligibility (denial or termination of FIP with no minimum penalty period).
- Case closure for a minimum of three or 12 months.

See [BEM 233B](#) for the Food Assistance Program (FAP) policy when the FIP penalty is closure. For the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) penalty policy, see [BEM 233C](#).

NONCOMPLIANCE WITH EMPLOYMENT AND/OR SELFSUFFICIENCYRELATED 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:

Exception: Do not apply the three or 12 month penalty to ineligible caretakers, clients deferred for lack of child care (DC)

and disqualified aliens. Failure to complete a FAST or FSSP results in closure due to failure to provide requested verification.

Clients can reapply at any time.

- 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.

Note: FIS should clear the FAST Fall Out Report and any FAST confirmation information the client has obtained before considering a client noncompliant for FAST non-completion.

- Develop a Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or a Personal Responsibility Plan and Family Contract (PRPFC).

Note: FIS must have scheduled a FSSP completion appointment with the client and the client failed to attend before considering a client noncompliant for FSSP non-completion.

- Comply with activities assigned to on the Family Self Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or PRPFC.
- Provide legitimate documentation of work participation.
- 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.

Refusing Suitable Employment.

Refusing suitable employment means doing **any** of the following:

- Voluntarily reducing hours or otherwise reducing earnings.
- Quitting a job (see exception below).

Exception: This does NOT apply if:

- The MWA verifies that the client changed jobs or reduced hours in order to participate in an MWA approved education and training program.
- A teen parent or dependent child quits a seasonal job to return to a high school or GED program.
- Firing for misconduct or absenteeism (not for incompetence).

Note: Misconduct sufficient to warrant firing includes any action by an employee or other adult group member that is harmful to the interest of the employer, and is done intentionally or in disregard of the employer's interest, or is due to gross negligence. It includes but is not limited to drug or alcohol influence at work, physical violence, and theft or willful destruction of property connected with the individual's work.

- Refusing a bona fide offer of employment or additional hours **up to** 40 hours per week. A bona fide offer of employment means a definite offer paying wages of at least the applicable state minimum wage. The employment may be on a shift; full or part time **up to** 40 hours per week; and temporary, seasonal or permanent.

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.

NONCOMPLIANCE PENALTIES AT APPLICATION

Noncompliance by a WEI while the application is pending results in **group** ineligibility. A WEI applicant who refused employment without good cause, within 30 days prior to the date of application or while the application is pending must have benefits delayed.

A good cause determination is not required for applicants who are noncompliant prior to FIP case opening.

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.

Begin the sanction period with the first pay period of a month. Penalties are automatically calculated by the entry of noncompliance without good cause on the FSSP. This applies to active FIP cases, including those with a member add who is a WEI JET participant.

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 requirements 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.

PROCESSING THE FIP CLOSURE

Follow the procedures outlined below for processing the FIP closure:

- Send a DHS-2444, Notice of Employment and/or Self-Sufficiency-Related Noncompliance, within three days after learning of the noncompliance. You must include the following information on the DHS-2444:
 - The date(s) of the noncompliance.
 - The reason the client was determined to be noncompliant.
 - The penalty that will be imposed.
 - Schedule a triage to be held within the negative action period.

- Determine good cause during triage and prior to the negative action effective date. Good cause must be verified and can be based on information already on file with the DHS or the JET program.

Document the good cause determination on the sanction detail screen.

First Case Noncompliance Without Loss of Benefits

If the noncompliant client meets or if a phone triage is held with a FIS and/or the JET case manager and the decision regarding the noncompliance is *No Good Cause*, do the following:

1. Discuss and provide a DHS -754, First Noncompliance Letter, regarding sanctions that will be imposed if the client continues to be noncompliant.
2. Offer the client the opportunity to comply with the FSSP by the due date on the DHS-754 and within the negative action period.
3. Advise the client that the instance of noncompliance will remain on record even if the client complies. The noncompliance will be excused, but not erased and could result in longer sanctions if the client is noncompliant in the future.
4. If the client **accepts** the offer to comply and agrees with the department's decision of noncompliance without good cause, use the first check box on the DHS-754 and document compliance activities. Include the number of hours of participation the client must perform to meet the compliance activity requirement. Advise the client that verification of the compliance is required by the due date on the DHS-754.
5. When a phone triage is conducted for a first noncompliance and the client agrees to comply, complete the DHS-754 as you would complete for an in-person triage meeting. When completing the form 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 and the JET case manager was not included in the phone triage.

6. Enter the outcome of the *Excuse Offer* in Bridges.
7. When the client verifies compliance before the *Excuse Offer* due date and is meeting the assigned activity that corrects the noncompliance, reinstate the case with no loss of benefits.

Note: Verification of completion of a compliance activity may include a signed copy of the DHS-754 or any collateral contact with JET or other service provider.

8. If the client **does not accept** the offer to comply, document the decision in Bridges
9. If the client **disagrees** with the department's decision of noncompliance without good cause, use the second check box on the DHS-754 that advises the client not to sign the form. Assist the client with filing a hearing request and advise them that if they lose the hearing, they will receive a new notice of noncompliance and a new meeting date and they have the right to agree to activities outlined on the DHS-754 and avoid the financial penalty at that time, unless another group member uses the family's first excuse before the hearing issue is settled.
10. Send a new DHS-2444 with an appointment date and time. The client must attend the triage and comply with assigned activities before the 754 due date.
11. You must enter all triage results at one time in Bridges. If the client fails to meet or contact the FIS or fails to provide verification of compliance without good cause, the three-month sanction applies.

This policy only applies for the first case of noncompliance on or after April 1, 2007. It is only offered one time for each case for the first noncompliant member on that case when there is no good cause. (BEM 233A)

In this case the Department followed their policy. Claimant does not dispute failing to attend the Michigan Works Agency/Jobs Education and Training Program (JET) on April 13, 2010. Claimant asserts she was too sick to attend and the Work First/Jobs Education and Training Appointment Notice (DHS-4785 form) states that she had 20 days from the date of

notice to attend. The First Non-Compliance Letter (DHS-754) which Claimant agreed to comply with required her to attend work first for 35 hours or provide medical deferral proof by April 14, 2010.

At first glance the two documents discussed above appear to have conflicting requirements. However, the First Non-Compliance Letter (DHS-754) specifically states:

You agreed you were noncompliant without good cause and to do the activities listed below to avoid losing your FIP benefits. This opportunity will be provided one time only for each family. You must use this form to verify you did these activities by 04/14/2010.

There can be no doubt that the First Non-Compliance Letter (DHS-754) contains the controlling instructions.

Claimant also asserts she had good cause because she was too ill to attend on April 13, 2010. The policy cited above clearly states that good cause assertions must be verified and documented. Claimant has presented no documentation to support her assertion. Additionally, the credibility of the very assertion is questionable since Claimant called the Department case worker on both April 12 and 13, and never mentioned an illness or any problem with attending the Michigan Works Agency/Jobs Education and Training Program (JET).

Claimant failed the compliance test and the sanction shall be applied.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides the Department of Human Services properly sanctioned Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) case for failure to participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities.

It is ORDERED that the actions of the Department of Human Services, in this matter, are UPHELD.

/s/

Gary F. Heisler
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: July 1, 2010

Date Mailed: July 2, 2010

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.

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.

GFH/alc

cc:

[REDACTED]