

STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:



Reg. No: 2010-55750

Issue No: 1038



Hearing Date:

October 27, 2010

Monroe County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: **Suzanne L. Morris**

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 October 27, 2010. The claimant personally appeared and provided testimony, along with Sarah Douglas, a Work First/Jobs, Education and Training (WF/JET) case worker. Michelle Guzman-Merrill appeared on behalf of the department.

ISSUES

Did the department properly terminate the claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits and sanction the claimant from the Food Assistance Program (FAP) for noncompliance with Work First/Jobs, Education and Training (WF/JET) requirements?

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 referred to the WF/JET program and was participating as required.
2. The claimant's boyfriend, Timothy Richards, was mailed a JET Appointment Notice on July 15, 2010, requiring him to attend WF/JET within 20 days of the letter. (Department Exhibit 7)

3. Mr. Richards did not attend WF/JET and the department mailed a Notice of Noncompliance to him on August 30, 2010. The notice scheduled a triage appointment on September 9, 2010. (Department Exhibit 5)
4. Neither Mr. Richards nor the claimant attended the triage appointment and the department determined the claimant's FIP should close and Mr. Richards should be sanctioned from the FAP group.
5. The claimant submitted a hearing request on September 15, 2010.

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 Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

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 Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

Department policy indicates:

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 BEM 228, who fails, without good cause, to participate in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, must be penalized.

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. BEM 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 related to assigned activities.
- .. Provide legitimate documentation of work participation.
- .. 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. BEM 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 in Bridges and the FSSP under the "Participation and Compliance" tab.

See "School Attendance" BEM 201 for good cause when minor parents do not attend school.

Employed 40 Hours

Client Unfit

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. BEM 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. BEM 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. BEM 233A, pp.4-5.

EFIP

EFIP unless noncompliance is job quit, firing or voluntarily reducing hours of employment.

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. BEM 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. BEM 233A, pp. 10-11.

When to Disqualify

- . Disqualify a FAP group member for noncompliance when:
- . The client was active both FIP and FAP on the date of the FIP noncompliance, and
- . The client did not comply with FIP employment requirements, and
- . The client is not deferred from FAP work requirements (see DEFERRALS in BEM 230B), and the client did not have good cause for the noncompliance. BEM 233B, p. 1.

The claimant is disputing the department's actions in closing her FIP benefits and sanctioning her boyfriend, Timothy Richards, from the FAP group. The department indicates that the claimant's boyfriend, Timothy Richards, was noncompliant with WF/JET requirements and the FIP was properly closed and he was properly sanctioned from the FAP group.

The department testified that [REDACTED] was mailed a JET Appointment Notice on July 15, 2010, requiring his attendance within 20 days. It is not disputed that [REDACTED] was mailed the notice and did not attend WF/JET. Normally, this would be grounds for a WF/JET noncompliance finding.

However, in this case, the claimant testified that she had talked to WF/JET staff who told her that since she was meeting the required hours, her boyfriend did not need to participate. The claimant testified that she and her boyfriend are required to participate for 35 hours each week. The claimant further testified that she was told that as long as she was meeting the requirements, her boyfriend would not have to participate. This is corroborated by the testimony of WF/JET staff member [REDACTED] and a written statement from WF/JET staff member, [REDACTED] (who was unable to attend the hearing). [REDACTED] testified that she was on leave and [REDACTED] was covering for her when the claimant first began attending WF/JET. [REDACTED] had only been an employee for about one week when he met with the claimant. Mr. Palmer informed the claimant that as long as she was meeting the required hours, her boyfriend would not

have to participate. [REDACTED] was under the impression that [REDACTED] would automatically be enrolled as a non-participating parent. However, this was not the case and DHS issued him notice to attend WF/JET. [REDACTED] also confirms that the claimant was meeting the required amount of hours for the family.

It is clear from the evidence presented that WF/JET staff told the claimant (although incorrectly) that [REDACTED] did not have to participate with WF/JET because the claimant was completing the required hours for the entire household. Due to this, the claimant can not be penalized for the lack of [REDACTED]' participation, as she was complying with the instructions given to her by the WF/JET staff. Thus, this Administrative Law Judge finds that there was no noncompliance and that the department improperly sanctioned the claimants' case.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department improperly closed the claimant's FIP benefits and improperly sanctioned the claimant's boyfriend from the FAP group.

Accordingly, the department is REVERSED. The department shall:

1. Reopen the claimant's FIP benefits as of the date of closure and issue the claimants any retroactive FIP benefits they are entitled to receive.
2. Reengage both claimants with WF/JET by mailing the claimants new notices to participate with WF/JET.
3. Place [REDACTED] back into the FAP group as of the date of his removal and issue the claimants any retroactive FAP benefits they are entitled to receive.

SO ORDERED.

/s/

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

Date Signed: 11/19/2010

Date Mailed: 11/19/2010

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 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.

[REDACTED]