

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: 2010-14565
Issue No: 3002
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
March 3, 2010
Kalamazoo 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 March 3, 2010. The claimant personally appeared and provided testimony.

ISSUE

Did the department properly budget the claimant's Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits?

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 is receiving Unemployment Compensation Benefits (UCB) in the amount of \$774 bi-weekly. (Department Exhibit 5 – 8).
2. The claimant receives child support, which the department averaged and included in the FAP budget. (Department Exhibit 9 – 10, 12).

3. The department's FAP budget indicates that the claimant is to receive \$16 in FAP benefits per month. (Department Exhibit 15, 20).

4. The claimant submitted a hearing request on December 15, 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.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

All Programs

Unemployment benefits include:

- . Unemployment Compensation Benefits (UCB) available through the Michigan Unemployment Agency and comparable agencies in other states, and
- . Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUB pay) from an employer or other source.

Count the gross amount as unearned income. PEM, Item 500, p. 34.

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 may 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 past 30 days 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 past 60 or 90 days 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 not 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.

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. A standard deduction from income of \$132 is allowed. Another deduction from income is provided if monthly shelter costs are in excess of 50% of the household's income after all of the other deductions have been allowed, up to a maximum of \$300 for non-senior/disabled/veteran households. 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 does not appear to have properly computed the claimant's FAP benefits. The claimant's unearned income for September, October and November was only \$1248.08 (See Department Exhibit 21 "Unearned Income Budget—Summary"). However, the claimant appears to have earned \$774 biweekly in just UCB income. Department policy requires income earned bi-weekly to be multiplied by 2.15. PEM 505. Thus, the budgetable amount of UCB income

would appear to \$1664, in addition to any federal stimulus funds that may be included in the claimant's UCB.

This figure also does not include the claimant's child support income. The child support income appeared to be averaged correctly at \$514 per month. However, the total unearned income included on the November, 2009 budget is \$1762. This would appear to be too low to include the full amount of UCB income, plus the child support income. Thus, it appears that the unearned income amounts used for at least September, October and November were not correct. If the claimant is still receiving the full amount of UCB, it would appear that the amount of UCB income used for December, January and February may also be inaccurate.

This Administrative Law Judge also notes that while the "Standard Allowance – Summary" page of the BRIDGES printout shows that the claimant is responsible for heating costs, the claimant is not being given the \$555 heat and utility standard. Thus, the department must clarify what standards the claimant is eligible for and ensure they are budgeted accordingly.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department improperly budgeted the claimant's FAP benefits beginning June, 2009.

Accordingly, the department is REVERSED. The department shall:

1. Rebudget the claimant's FAP budget beginning September, 2009 to present to accurately reflect the proper child support and UCB income amounts.
2. Determine which heat and utility standard the claimant is eligible for and ensure that/those standards are reflected in the claimant's FAP budget.
3. Issue the claimant written notice of the corrected FAP benefits.

SO ORDERED.

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

Date Signed: March 16, 2010

Date Mailed: March 17, 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.

SLK 

cc:

