

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: 2010-30014
Issue No: 1038
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
May 17, 2010
Ingham County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Susanne E. Harris

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon the claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on May 17, 2010. The claimant personally appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the department act in accordance with departmental policy when taking action to close the claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits due to a group member's non-compliance with the WF/JET (Work First/Jobs Education and Training) program?

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 an ongoing recipient of FIP benefits in the amount of \$828.00.
- (2) On February 9, 2010, the department sent the claimant a DHS-2444, Notice of Non-compliance informing the claimant that, as she did not participate with the required activity

on February 4, 2010, she was non-compliance with the WF/JET program and therefore a triage appointment was scheduled for her on February 17, 2010 at 3:00 p.m. to afford the claimant an opportunity to establish good cause for her non-compliance.

(3) On February 17, 2010, the claimant telephoned her case worker to inform the case worker that she was unable to attend the triage. The worker told the claimant that she had until the end of the day to submit her verification that she had not falsified her community service log.

(4) On February 20, 2010, the department applied the employment-related sanction to the claimant's case as the verification had not been submitted.

(5) On March 29, 2010, the department received the claimant's written hearing request protesting the closure of her FIP case.

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).

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

BEM 233A FAILURE TO MEET EMPLOYMENT AND/OR SELF SUFFICIENCY-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 SELFSUFFICIENCY 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:

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 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.

HEARINGS

Expedited Hearings

Staff must identify cases for SOAHR (administrative hearings) when a client files a hearing based on closure due to noncompliance with an employment and/or self-sufficiency related activity. SOAHR has agreed to expedite these hearing requests in an effort to engage clients in a timely manner and improve the state’s overall work participation rate. Write “**Expedited Hearing E&T**” at the top of the hearing request so that it can be easily identified as a priority. Refer to PAM 600, “[Expedited Hearings](#)” for additional instructions.

Hearing Decisions

When a hearing decision is upheld for noncompliance, impose the penalty for the first full month possible for either 3 or 12 months. Do not recoup benefits.

BEM 233B FAILURE TO MEET EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS: FAP

DEPARTMENT PHILOSOPHY

DHS requires participation in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities associated with the Family Independence Program (FIP) or Refugee Assistance Program (RAP). Applicants or recipients of Food Assistance Program (FAP) only must accept and maintain employment. There are consequences for client, who refuses to participate in FIP/RAP employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities or refuses to accept or maintain employment without good cause.

DEPARTMENT POLICY

The policies in this item apply to all FAP applicants and recipients age 16 and over. Noncompliance, without good cause, with employment requirements for FIP/RAP (see [BEM 233A](#)) may affect FAP if **both** programs were active on the date of the FIP noncompliance.

Michigan's FAP Employment and Training program is voluntary and penalties for noncompliance may only apply in the following two situations:

- Client is active FIP/RAP and FAP and becomes noncompliant with a cash program requirement without good cause.
- Client is pending or active FAP only and refuses employment (voluntarily quits a job, is fired or voluntarily reduces hours of employment) without good cause.

At no other time is a client considered noncompliant with employment or self-sufficiency related requirements for FAP.

PROCESS FOR FIP/RAP ASSOCIATED NONCOMPLIANCE

When you learn that a client is noncompliant do the following:

- Send the DHS-2444, Notice of Employment and/or Self-Sufficiency Related Noncompliance within three days of the noncompliance. Check all programs that apply to the noncompliance (FIP/RAP and/or RAP) and the related penalty count that applies to each as outlined on the form.
- Hold the triage appointment/phone conference and document the results in Bridges. **Note:** If the client does not participate in the triage meeting, determine good cause for FAP based on information known at the time of the determination.
- Determine FAP good cause separately from the FIP/RAP based on FAP good cause reasons defined later in this item. If a good cause reason is selected for FIP/RAP it also applies to FAP. If the client does not meet one of the FIP/RAP good cause reasons in the drop down list, but does meet one of the FAP only good cause reasons, select the FAP only good cause reason to avoid client disqualification on FAP. Bridges makes both determinations simultaneously.

When To Disqualify

Disqualify a FAP group member for noncompliance when all the following exist:

- The client was **active** both FIP and FAP on the date of the FIP noncompliance, **and**
- The client did **not** comply with FIP/RAP employment requirements, **and**
- The client is subject to a penalty on the FIP/RAP program, **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.

PEM 230B EMPLOYMENT-RELATED ACTIVITIES: FAP

DEPARTMENT PHILOSOPHY

Department of Human Services (DHS) has a unique opportunity to assist families in becoming strong, viable, participative members of the community. By involving the adult members of the household in employment-related activities, we help restore self-confidence and a sense of self-worth. These are cornerstones to building strong, self-reliant families. The goal of the Food Assistance Program is to ensure sound nutrition among children and adults. In addition, the goal of our employment-related policies for FAP households is to assist applicants and recipients toward self-sufficiency by providing them with opportunities to pursue employment and/or education and training.

DEPARTMENT POLICY

Use this item to determine work-related activities and deferrals for FAP clients. Also use this item when FIP or RAP closes for any reason other than a penalty or disqualification. The items listed below must be used when FIP or RAP closes due to noncompliance and a penalty or disqualification is imposed.

If the noncompliant client:

- Received FIP and FAP on the date of noncompliance, see [BEM 233B](#).
- Received RAP and FAP on the date of noncompliance, see [BEM 233C](#).
- Did not receive FIP or RAP on the date of noncompliance, see [BEM 233B](#).

DEFERRALS

Clients meeting one of the criteria below are temporarily deferred from employment-related activities.

Age

Defer a person who is:

- Under age 16 or at least age 60; **or**
- A 16- or 17-year old who is **not** the grantee; **or**
- A grantee age 16 or 17 who
 - Lives with a parent or person in that role, **or**
 - Attends school at least **half time**, **or**
 - Is enrolled in an employment/training program at least **halftime**.

Care of a Child

Defer one person who personally provides care for a child under age 6 who is in the FAP group.

Care of Disabled Household Member

Defer one person who personally provides care for a disabled member of his/her own FAP group.

Disability

Defer persons incapacitated due to injury, physical illness or mental illness.

Education

A student enrolled at least **half time** in any recognized school, training program or institution of higher education meets the employment related activities requirement. This includes persons attending school for GED or adult high school completion.

Pregnancy

Defer pregnant women, beginning the **seventh** month of pregnancy **or** earlier if a pregnancy complication is medically documented. Confirmation by an MD, DO, certified nurse-midwife, ob-gyn nurse practitioner or ob-gyn clinical nurse specialist which **must** include an expected date of delivery.

SSI/FAP Applicants

Defer applicants who apply for **both** SSI and FAP through the Social Security Administration. The application for SSI and FAP must be made at the same time.

Substance Abuse Treatment Center Participant

Defer active participants in inpatient or outpatient programs for substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation. This does not include AA or NA group meetings.

Unemployment Compensation (UC) Applicant or Recipient

Defer an applicant for or recipient of unemployment compensation (UC). This includes a person whose UC application denial is being appealed.

In this case, the allegation is that the claimant falsified her community service log by tracing over a 3 to make it appear to be an 8 when documenting how many hours she served. The claimant only contests that it was she who falsified this log, but further testified that it was only she who had control over the document before it is submitted to WF/JET. The claimant testified that the WF/JET worker refused to write a letter, verifying that the claimant did not falsify her log, for the claimant's triage.

As the [REDACTED] Verification form is admittedly in the claimant's control until the time of submission and as no one else has been identified as having a motive for forging this document, this ALJ concludes that the claimant did alter the document to indicate that she volunteered eight hours, instead of three on January 29, 2010. This finding is consistent with the hours totaling 21, where as if the document is not forged, the hours only total 16 and the form indicates that the claimant is required to participate 20 hours per week. The ALJ therefore also concludes that the claimant had no good cause for falsifying the amount of her participation.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department was acting according to the department's policy when taking action to close the claimant's FIP case. Accordingly, the department's actions are AFFIRMED.

SO ORDERED.

/s/ _____
Susanne E. Harris
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: July 15, 2010

Date Mailed: July 15, 2010

NOTICE: The law provides that within 30 days of receipt of the above Decision and Order the claimant may appeal it to the circuit court for the county in which he/she lives. Administrative Hearings, on its own motion, or on request of a party within 30 days of the receipt of this Decision and Order, may order a rehearing. Administrative Hearings will not order a rehearing on the agency's motion where the final decision or rehearing cannot be implemented within 90 days of the filing of the original hearing request.

SEH/tg

cc:

