

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 201050931
Issue No: 1038
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: September 30, 2010
Van Buren 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 hearing was held on September 30, 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. Claimant was a mandatory participant in the Michigan Works Agency/Jobs Education and Training Program (JET).
- (2) On July 8, 2010 Claimant participated in 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 signed a First Non-Compliance Letter (DHS-754) agreeing to provide a Medical Needs Form (DHS-54a) by July 23, 2010 in order to avoid a sanction of his case.

- (3) On July 22, 2010 Claimant left a voicemail message with his DHS case worker stating he missed a [REDACTED] appointment to have the required Medical Needs Form (DHS-54a) filled out, because he was incarcerated for domestic violence.
- (4) On July 26, 2010 Claimant's DHS case worker sent Claimant a letter stating he could avoid sanction of his case by providing a Medical Needs Form (DHS-54a) and verification of his incarceration by August 5, 2010.
- (5) On August 10, 2010 no Medical Needs Form (DHS-54a) or verification of incarceration had been received by the Department. Claimant was sent a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) stating that her Family Independence Program (FIP) case would be sanctioned.
- (6) On August 19, 2010 Claimant submitted a timely 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.

**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 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:

Exception: Do not apply the three or 12 month penalty to ineligible caretakers, clients deferred for lack of child care 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 any alerts relating to rejected JET refunds and any FAST confirmation information the client has obtained before considering a client noncompliant for FAST completion.

- Develop a Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP).

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 completion.

- Comply with activities assigned on the FSSP.
 - Provide legitimate documentation of work participation.
 - Appear for a scheduled appointment or meeting related to assigned activities.
 - 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.

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 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.

In this case Claimant asserts he did not meet the first requirement he had to avoid a sanction of his case due to being incarcerated. The Department has already given him a second opportunity to avoid sanction of his case by extending the date for him to provide a Medical Needs Form (DHS-54a). It is undisputed that Claimant has never provided a Medical Needs Form (DHS-54a) to the Department. In accordance with Department policy cited above, the sanction should be applied to Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) case.

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: October 6, 2010

Date Mailed: October 7, 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/vc

cc:

