

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

IN THE MATTER OF:



Reg. No: 2010-51301  
Issue No: 2009; 4031  
Case No: [REDACTED]  
Hearing Date: September 30, 2010  
Berrien #22 County DHS

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:** Carmen G. Fahie

**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 Thursday, September 30, 2010. Claimant personally appeared and testified on her own behalf.

**ISSUE**

Did the Department of Human Services (the department) properly determine that claimant was no longer disabled and deny her review application for Medical Assistance (MA-P) and State Disability Assistance (SDA) based upon medical improvement?

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

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

1. On June 1, 2010, the claimant filed a medical review application for MA-P and SDA benefits alleging continued disability.
2. On August 4, 2010, the Medical Review Team denied claimant's application stating that claimant had medical improvement for MA-P and SDA citing cessation to unskilled work due to primary substance abuse with no current treatment.
3. On August 9, 2010, the department caseworker sent claimant notice that her Medical Assistance case would be cancelled based upon medical improvement.
4. On August 20, 2010, claimant filed a request for a hearing to contest the department's negative action.

5. On September 7, 2010, the State Hearing Review Team denied claimant's review application for MA-P and SDA. The claimant is alleging disability due to seizures, migraine headaches, asthma, bipolar disorder, and memory loss. She is [REDACTED] and has a limited education with a history of unskilled work. The objective medical evidence presented does not establish a disability at the listing or equivalence level. P.L. 104-121 is cited due to the materiality of drug and alcohol abuse. The medical evidence of record indicates that the claimant retains the capacity to perform a wide range of simple, unskilled, light work. Therefore, based on the claimant's vocational profile (younger individual, limited education and history of unskilled work); MA-P is denied due to medical improvement and using Vocational Rule 204.00 (H) as a guide. SDA is denied per PEM 261 because the nature and severity of the claimant's impairment would not preclude work activity for 90 days or more.
6. During the hearing on September 30, 2010, the claimant requested permission to submit additional medical information that needed to be reviewed by SHRT. Additional medical information was received from the local office and forwarded to SHRT for review on March 7, 2011.
7. On March 21, 2011, the SHRT considered the newly submitted objective medical evidence in making its determination of medical review of MA-P and SDA. The claimant is alleging disability due to pain, seizures, migraine, asthma, bipolar disorder, and memory loss. She is [REDACTED] and has a limited education with a history of no gainful employment. The objective medical evidence presented does not establish a disability at the listing or equivalence level. P.L. 104-121 and 20 CFR 416.935 are cited due to the materiality of drug and alcohol abuse. The evidence supports that significant medical improvement has taken place and continuing MA-P and SDA benefits are to be ceased. There is no evidence to support any limitations secondary to any physical conditions. The medical evidence of record indicates that the claimant retains the capacity to perform a wide range of simple and repetitive work. Therefore, based on the claimant's vocational profile (younger individual, limited education and history of no gainful employment), MA-P is denied due to medical improvement and using Vocational Rule 204.00 (H) as a guide. SDA is denied per PEM 261 because the nature and severity of the claimant's impairment would not preclude work activity for 90 days or more.
8. The claimant is a [REDACTED] woman whose birth date is [REDACTED]. Claimant is 5' 5" tall and weighs 145 pounds. Claimant completed the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of high school graduate. The claimant is able to read and write, but not do basic math of division. The claimant last worked as a farm laborer, but doesn't know when. The claimant has also worked as a packer.
9. Claimant alleges as disabling impairments of seizures, migraines, asthma, bipolar disorder, and memory loss.

## **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program which provides financial assistance for disabled persons is established by 2004 PA 344. The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3151-400.3180. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by Title XIX of the Social Security Act and is implemented by Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the MA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

"Disability" is:

...the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.... 20 CFR 416.905.

...We follow a set order to determine whether you are disabled. We review any current work activity, the severity of your impairment(s), your residual functional capacity, your past work, and your age, education and work experience. If we can find that you are disabled or not disabled at any point in the review, we do not review your claim further.... 20 CFR 416.920.

...If you are working and the work you are doing is substantial gainful activity, we will find that you are not disabled regardless of your medical condition or your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(b).

...[The impairment]...must have lasted or must be expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months. We call this the duration requirement. 20 CFR 416.909.

...If you do not have any impairment or combination of impairments which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, we will find that you do not have a severe impairment and are, therefore, not disabled.

We will not consider your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(c).

[In reviewing your impairment]...We need reports about your impairments from acceptable medical sources.... 20 CFR 416.913(a).

...Statements about your pain or other symptoms will not alone establish that you are disabled; there must be medical signs and laboratory findings which show that you have a medical impairment.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...You must provide medical evidence showing that you have an impairment(s) and how severe it is during the time you say that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.912(c).

... [The record must show a severe impairment] which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities.... 20 CFR 416.920(c).

...Medical reports should include --

Medical history.

Clinical findings (such as the results of physical or mental status examinations); Laboratory findings (such as blood pressure, X-rays); Diagnosis (statement of disease or injury based on its signs and symptoms).... 20 CFR 416.913(b).

...The medical evidence...must be complete and detailed enough to allow us to make a determination about whether you are disabled or blind. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Medical findings consist of symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings:

- (a) **Symptoms** are your own description of your physical or mental impairment. Your statements alone are not enough to establish that there is a physical or mental impairment.
- (b) **Signs** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be observed, apart from your statements (symptoms). Signs must be shown by medically acceptable clinical diagnostic techniques. Psychiatric signs are medically demonstrable phenomena which indicate specific psychological abnormalities e.g., abnormalities of behavior, mood, thought, memory, orientation, development, or perception. They must also be shown by observable facts that can be medically described and evaluated.

- (c) **Laboratory findings** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological phenomena which can be shown by the use of medically acceptable laboratory diagnostic techniques. Some of these diagnostic techniques include chemical tests, electrophysiological studies (electrocardiogram, electroencephalogram, etc.), roentgenological studies (X-rays), and psychological tests. 20 CFR 416.928.

It must allow us to determine --

- (1) The nature and limiting effects of your impairment(s) for any period in question;
- (2) The probable duration of your impairment; and
- (3) Your residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Information from other sources may also help us to understand how your impairment(s) affects your ability to work. 20 CFR 416.913(e).

...You can only be found disabled if you are unable to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death, or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months. See 20 CFR 416.905. Your impairment must result from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which are demonstrable by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques.... 20 CFR 416.927(a)(1).

...Evidence that you submit or that we obtain may contain medical opinions. Medical opinions are statements from physicians and psychologists or other acceptable medical sources that reflect judgments about the nature and severity of your impairment(s), including your symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, what you can still do despite impairment(s), and your physical or mental restrictions. 20 CFR 416.927(a)(2).

...In deciding whether you are disabled, we will always consider the medical opinions in your case record together with the rest of the relevant evidence we receive. 20 CFR 416.927(b).

After we review all of the evidence relevant to your claim, including medical opinions, we make findings about what the evidence shows. 20 CFR 416.927(c).

...If all of the evidence we receive, including all medical opinion(s), is consistent, and there is sufficient evidence for us to decide whether you are disabled, we will make our determination or decision based on that evidence. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(1).

...If any of the evidence in your case record, including any medical opinion(s), is inconsistent with other evidence or is internally inconsistent, we will weigh all of the evidence and see whether we can decide whether you are disabled based on the evidence we have. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(2).

[As Judge]...We are responsible for making the determination or decision about whether you meet the statutory definition of disability. In so doing, we review all of the medical findings and other evidence that support a medical source's statement that you are disabled.... 20 CFR 416.927(e).

...A statement by a medical source that you are "disabled" or "unable to work" does not mean that we will determine that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

...If you have an impairment(s) which meets the duration requirement and is listed in Appendix 1 or is equal to a listed impairment(s), we will find you disabled without considering your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(d).

...If we cannot make a decision on your current work activities or medical facts alone and you have a severe impairment, we will then review your residual functional capacity and the physical and mental demands of the work you have done in the past. If you can still do this kind of work, we will find that you are not disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(e).

If you cannot do any work you have done in the past because you have a severe impairment(s), we will consider your residual functional capacity and your age, education, and past work experience to see if you can do other work. If you cannot, we will find you disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(f)(1).

...Your residual functional capacity is what you can still do despite limitations. If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairment(s) of which we are

aware. We will consider your ability to meet certain demands of jobs, such as physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements, and other functions, as described in paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of this section. Residual functional capacity is an assessment based on all of the relevant evidence.... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...This assessment of your remaining capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled, but is used as the basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment(s).... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...In determining whether you are disabled, we will consider all of your symptoms, including pain, and the extent to which your symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with objective medical evidence, and other evidence.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...In evaluating the intensity and persistence of your symptoms, including pain, we will consider all of the available evidence, including your medical history, the medical signs and laboratory findings and statements about how your symptoms affect you... We will then determine the extent to which your alleged functional limitations or restrictions due to pain or other symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with the medical signs and laboratory findings and other evidence to decide how your symptoms affect your ability to work.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairments of which we are aware. We will consider your ability to meet certain demands of jobs, such as physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements, and other functions as described in paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of this section. Residual functional capacity is an assessment based upon all of the relevant evidence. This assessment of your capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled but is used as a basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment. 20 CFR 416.945.

...When we assess your physical abilities, we first assess the nature and extent of your physical limitations and then determine your residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. A limited ability to perform certain physical demands of work activity, such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, or other physical functions (including manipulative or postural functions, such as reaching, handling, stooping or

crouching), may reduce your ability to do past work and other work. 20 CFR 416.945(b).

In determining whether an individual is disabled, 20 CFR 416.920 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activity, the severity of the impairment(s), residual functional capacity, and vocational factors (i.e., age, education, and work experience) are assessed in that order. When a determination that an individual is or is not disabled can be made at any step in the sequential evaluation, evaluation under a subsequent step is not necessary.

Federal regulations require that the department use the same operative definition for “disabled” as used for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) under Title XVI of the Social Security Act. 42 CFR 435.540(a).

“Disability” is:

...the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months ... 20 CFR 416.905

In general, claimant has the responsibility to prove that he/she is disabled. Claimant’s impairment must result from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be shown by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques. A physical or mental impairment must be established by medical evidence consisting of signs, symptoms, and laboratory findings, not only claimant’s statement of symptoms. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.927. Proof must be in the form of medical evidence showing that the claimant has an impairment and the nature and extent of its severity. 20 CFR 416.912. Information must be sufficient to enable a determination as to the nature and limiting effects of the impairment for the period in question, the probable duration of the impairment and the residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913.

Once an individual has been determined to be “disabled” for purposes of disability benefits, continued entitlement to benefits must be periodically reviewed. In evaluating whether an individual’s disability continues, 20 CFR 416.994 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activities, severity of impairment(s), and the possibility of medical improvement and its relationship to the individual’s ability to work are assessed. Review may cease and benefits may be continued at any point if there is substantial evidence to find that the individual is unable to engage in substantial gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5).

First, the trier of fact must determine if the individual is working and if work is substantial gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(i). In this case, the claimant is not engaged in substantial gainful activity and has not worked.

Secondly, if the individual has an impairment or combination of impairments which meet or equal the severity of an impairment listed in Appendix 1 to Subpart P of Part

404 of Chapter 20, disability is found to continue. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(ii). In this case, the claimant's impairments or combination of impairments do not meet or equal the severity of an impairment listed in Appendix 1. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 2.

In the third step of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact must determine whether there has been medical improvement as defined in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(i). 20 CFR 416.994 (b)(5)(iii). Medical improvement is defined as any decrease in the medical severity of the impairment(s) which was present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision that the claimant was disabled or continues to be disabled. A determination that there has been a decrease in medical severity must be based on changes (improvement) in the symptoms, signs, and/or laboratory findings associated with claimant's impairment(s). If there has been medical improvement as shown by a decrease in medical severity, the trier of fact must proceed to Step 4 (which examines whether the medical improvement is related to the claimant's ability to do work). If there has been no decrease in medical severity and thus no medical improvement, the trier of fact moves to Step 5 in the sequential evaluation process.

On November 23, 2010, the claimant's treating physician submitted a progress report on behalf of the claimant. The claimant was diagnosed with acute and chronic anxiety reaction, bipolar disorder, classical tension headaches, irritable bowel syndrome and a history of asthma. She was anxious and tense during her physical examination. The claimant had an essentially normal physical exam. Her primary impairments were her anxiety and bipolar disorder. Department Exhibit c-d.

On July 7, 2010, the claimant was seen by an independent medical examiner, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for a psychological evaluation. The claimant was diagnosed with alcohol abuse, major depressive disorder, recurrent, severe without psychotic features. She had a current GAF of 53. The claimant was a depressed individual with low self-esteem. She feels that people are out to get her. The claimant does report occasional auditory hallucinatory experiences. She has a very flat affect with poor short-term memory and abstract reasoning with poor common judgment. The claimant is a depressed individual who has problems coping with the world around her. She did not have any markedly limitations. Department Exhibit 7-16.

At Step 3, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant does have medical improvement and her medical improvement is related to the claimant's ability to perform substantial gainful activity. The claimant had an essentially normal physical examination. Her psychological evaluation did not show evidence of a thought disorder or markedly limitations. The claimant is capable of performing simple and unskilled. The claimant has had medical improvement resulting in a decrease in medical severity. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified for receiving continued disability at Step 3.

In Step 4 of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact must determine whether medical improvement is related to claimant's ability to do work in accordance with 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(i) through (b)(1)(iv). 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(iv). It is the finding of this Administrative Law Judge, after careful review of the record, that there has been medical improvement.

At Step 4, the claimant does not perform her daily living activities, which is not supported by the independent medical examination. The claimant felt that her condition has worsened because she is on a lot of medication. The claimant testified that she did have mental impairments of depression where she is taking medications, but not in therapy. The claimant does not smoke since February 3, 2008 where before she smoked a ½ a pack of cigarettes a day. The claimant stopped drinking alcohol in 2005 where before she would drink occasionally. She has never used illegal or illicit drugs. The claimant did not think there was any work that she could do.

At Step 4, the claimant has no history of gainful employment. The claimant is therapy and taking medications for mental impairments. She was in treatment at Riverwood, but no records were submitted. The claimant should be able to perform simple and unskilled work. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 4. If there is a finding of medical improvement related to claimant's ability to perform work, the trier of fact is to move to Step 6 in the sequential evaluation process.

In the sixth step of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact is to determine whether the claimant's current impairment(s) is severe per 20 CFR 416.921. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(vi). If the residual functional capacity assessment reveals significant limitations upon a claimant's ability to engage in basic work activities, the trier of fact moves to Step 7 in the sequential evaluation process. In this case, this Administrative Law Judge finds claimant can perform at least simple and unskilled work even with her impairments. This Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant should be able to do simple, unskilled, light work. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 6.

In the seventh step of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact is to assess a claimant's current ability to engage in substantial gainful activities in accordance with 20 CFR 416.960 through 416.969. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(vii). The trier of fact is to assess the claimant's current residual functional capacity based on all current impairments and consider whether the claimant can still do work he/she has done in the past. In this case, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant should be able to perform simple and unskilled work.

In the final step, Step 8, of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact is to consider whether the claimant can do any other work, given the claimant's residual function capacity and claimant's age, education, and past work experience. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(viii). In this case, based upon the claimant's vocational profile of a younger individual, with a limited or less education, and a history of no gainful employment, MA-P is denied using Vocational Rule 202.17 as a guide. This Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant does have medical improvement in this case and the department has established by the necessary, competent, material and substantial evidence on the record that it was acting in compliance with department policy when it proposed to cancel claimant's MA-P benefits based upon medical improvement.

The department's Program Eligibility Manual provides the following policy statements and instructions for caseworkers regarding the SDA program.

## **DISABILITY – SDA**

### **DEPARTMENT POLICY**

#### **SDA**

To receive SDA, a person must be disabled, caring for a disabled person, or age 65 or older.

**Note:** There is no disability requirement for AMP. PEM 261, p. 1.

#### **DISABILITY**

A person is disabled for SDA purposes if he:

- . receives other specified disability-related benefits or services, or
- . resides in a qualified Special Living Arrangement facility, or
  
- . is certified as unable to work due to mental or physical disability for at least 90 days from the onset of the disability.
  
- . is diagnosed as having Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

If the client's circumstances change so that the basis of his/her disability is no longer valid, determine if he/she meets any of the other disability criteria. Do NOT simply initiate case closure. PEM, Item 261, p. 1.

#### **Other Benefits or Services**

Persons receiving one of the following benefits or services meet the SDA disability criteria:

- . Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI), due to disability or blindness.
  
- . Supplemental Security Income (SSI), due to disability or blindness.
  
- . Medicaid (including spend-down) as blind or disabled if the disability/blindness is based on:
  - .. a DE/MRT/SRT determination, or
  
  - .. a hearing decision, or

- .. having SSI based on blindness or disability recently terminated (within the past 12 months) for financial reasons.

Medicaid received by former SSI recipients based on policies in PEM 150 under "**SSI TERMINATIONS,**" INCLUDING "**MA While Appealing Disability Termination,**" does not qualify a person as disabled for SDA. Such persons must be certified as disabled or meet one of the other SDA qualifying criteria. See "**Medical Certification of Disability**" below.

- . Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS). A person is receiving services if he has been determined eligible for MRS and has an active MRS case. Do not refer or advise applicants to apply for MRS for the purpose of qualifying for SDA.
- . Special education services from the local intermediate school district. To qualify, the person may be:
  - .. attending school under a special education plan approved by the local Individual Educational Planning Committee (IEPC); **or**
  - .. not attending under an IEPC approved plan but has been certified as a special education student **and** is attending a school program leading to a high school diploma or its equivalent, **and** is under age 26. The program does not have to be designated as "special education" as long as the person has been certified as a special education student. Eligibility on this basis continues until the person completes the high school program or reaches age 26, whichever is earlier.
- . Refugee or asylee who lost eligibility for Social Security Income (SSI) due to exceeding the maximum time limit PEM, Item 261, pp. 1-2.

Because the claimant does not meet the definition of disabled under the MA-P program and because the evidence on record does not establish that claimant is unable to work for a period exceeding 90 days, the claimant does not meet the disability criteria for continued State Disability Assistance benefits either.

### **DECISION AND ORDER**

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department has appropriately established on the record that it

was acting in compliance with department policy when it denied claimant's continued disability for MA-P and SDA. The claimant should be able to perform simple and unskilled work. The department has established its case by a preponderance of the evidence. The claimant does have medical improvement based upon the objective medical findings in the file.

Accordingly, the department's decision is **AFFIRMED**.

/s/  
Carmen G. Fahie  
Administrative Law Judge  
for Maura D. Corrigan, Director  
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: 2/24/12

Date Mailed: 2/24/12

**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.

CGF/ds

