

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING SYSTEM
FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 2011-26789
Issue No: 1025; 3019

[REDACTED]

Gratiot County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Vicki L. Armstrong

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 received on [REDACTED]. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on [REDACTED]. Claimant personally appeared and provided testimony.

ISSUE

Whether the department properly determined Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) and Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits should be closed due to non-cooperation with the Office of Child Support?

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 receiving FIP and FAP at all times pertinent to this hearing. (Hearing Summary).
2. On February 2, 2011, the department mailed Claimant a Notice of Case Action informing her that her FIP and FAP programs would be closed effective March 1, 2011, because she had failed to cooperate in establishing paternity or securing Child Support. (Department Exhibits 6-8).
3. Claimant timely submitted a hearing request on February 10, 2011, protesting the closure of her FIP and FAP benefits. (Request for a Hearing).

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The regulations governing the hearing and appeal process for applicants and recipients of public assistance in Michigan are found in the Michigan Administrative Code, MAC R 400.901-400.951. An opportunity for a hearing shall be granted to an applicant who requests a hearing because his claim for assistance is denied. MAC R 400.903(1).

Clients have the right to contest a department decision affecting eligibility or benefit levels whenever it is believed that the decision is incorrect. The department will provide an administrative hearing to review the decision and determine the appropriateness. BAM 600.

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 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 FIP and FAP programs pursuant to MCL 400.10, et seq., and MAC R 400.3101-3131 and MCL 400.10, et seq., and MAC R 400.3001-3015 respectively. 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), Reference Table Manual (RFT), and the Bridges Reference Manual (BRM).

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 Bridges Reference Manual (BRM).

The department's philosophy is that families are strengthened when children's needs are met. Parents have a responsibility to meet their children's needs by providing support and/or cooperating with the department including the Office of Child Support (OCS), the Friend of the Court, and the prosecuting attorney to establish paternity and/or obtain support from an absent parent. BEM 255.

Clients must comply with all requests for action or information needed to establish paternity and/or obtain child support on behalf of children for whom they receive assistance, unless a claim of good cause for not cooperating has been granted or is pending. Absent parents are required to support their children. Support includes child support, medical support, and payment for medical care from any third party. For purposes of this item, a parent who does not live with the child due solely to the parent's active duty in a uniformed service of the U.S. is considered to be living in the child's home.

Failure to cooperate without good cause results in disqualification. Disqualification includes member removal, denial of program benefits, and/or case closure, depending on the program. However, a pregnant woman who fails to cooperate may still be eligible for Medicaid. BEM 255.

Exceptions to the cooperation requirement for FIP, CDC income eligible, Medicaid and FAP programs are allowed for all child support actions except failure to return court-ordered support payments received after the payment effective date. Good cause is granted only if requiring cooperation/support action is against the child's best interests, and there is a specific "good cause" reason. If good cause exists, cooperation is excused as an eligibility requirement for the child involved, but it can still be required for another child in the same family. BEM 255.

Cooperation is a condition of eligibility. The grantee and spouse, the specified relative/person acting as a parent and spouse, and the parent of the child for whom paternity and/or support action is required in the eligible group, are required to cooperate in establishing paternity and obtaining support, unless good cause has been granted or is pending. Cooperation is required in all phases of the process to establish paternity and obtain support and includes all of the following:

- . Contacting the SS when requested.
- . Providing all known information about the absent parent.
- . Appearing at the office of the prosecuting attorney when requested.
- . Taking any actions needed to establish paternity and obtain child support (e.g., testifying at hearings or obtaining blood tests).

The department will be notified of a Client's failure to cooperate by the SS or the child support noncooperation report. Upon receipt of this notice, the department starts the support disqualification procedure. The disqualification will not be imposed if any of the following occur during the negative action period:

- . The department is notified by the Office of Child Support (OCS) that the client has cooperated.
- . The case closes for another reason.
- . The noncooperative person leaves the group.
- . Support/paternity action is no longer a factor in the child's eligibility (e.g., the child leaves the group).
- . For disqualifications based on failure to return court-ordered support, the client cooperates with the requirement of returning court-ordered support payments or the support order is certified. BEM 255.

In this case, Claimant credibly testified that she had never received a letter from the Office of Child Support informing her that she was in non-compliance. Claimant stated that the first time she had heard she was in non-compliance was when the department closed her FIP and FAP benefits for non-compliance. Claimant testified that she has been calling the Office of Child Support to find out why they have her as non-compliant and they have not returned her telephone calls.

The department representative also testified that she had called the Office of Child Support on numerous occasions, and like Claimant, she also had never had her telephone calls returned. A worker from the Office of Child Support was not present at the hearing, and the department case worker did not have personal knowledge of the case. The department was also unable to produce a Noncooperation Notice from the Office of Child Support (OCS 1252), and had only the Notice of Case Action and Child Support Non-Cooperation Details with the date January 4, 2011, to rely on that Claimant was in non-cooperation status with the Office of Child Support.

The Administrative Law Judge finds that the department has not met its burden of proof. The department failed to provide any evidence, other than a Bridges printout, that Claimant was non-cooperative with the Office of Child Support.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department improperly closed Claimant's FIP and FAP benefit cases because the department failed to provide any evidence that Claimant had not cooperated.

Accordingly, the department's actions are REVERSED and Claimant's FIP and FAP programs shall be reinstated effective March 1, 2011, and Claimant shall be issued any supplement FIP and FAP benefits to which she is otherwise entitled.

It is SO ORDERED.

_____/s/_____
Vicki L. Armstrong
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura D. Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: 5/13/11

Date Mailed: 5/13/11

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 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.

[REDACTED]