

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

IN THE MATTER OF:



Reg. No: 2011-3857
Issue No: 1038



Hearing Date: January 20, 2011
Bay 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 January 20, 2011. The claimant personally appeared and provided testimony.

ISSUE

Did the department properly determine the claimant was noncompliant with the Family Independence Program (FIP) requirement of attending the Work First/Jobs, Education and Training (WF/JET) 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 previously indicated she was unable to participate with WF/JET due to an alleged disability. The claimant's medical history was evaluated by the Medical Review Team (MRT) in June, 2009 and again in November, 2009. MRT determined the claimant was not disabled and could work with some limitations. MRT further determined that the claimant could participate with WF/JET. (Department Exhibit 22 - 24)
2. The claimant was required to participate with WF/JET for 30 hours each week. (Department Exhibit 14)

3. The claimant had a triage on September 8, 2010. The claimant was granted good cause for the noncompliance at that triage appointment because she had provided some documentation that her child had been ill. (Department Exhibit 7 – 8)
4. The claimant was to re-engage with WF/JET on September 13, 2010. (Department Exhibit 7)
5. The claimant attended September 13, 2010 and part of September 14, 2010, but did not call or report the rest of the week. (Department Exhibit 13)
6. The claimant was mailed a Notice of Noncompliance (DHS-2444) on September 23, 2010, scheduling a triage for September 30, 2010. (Department Exhibit 5 – 6)
7. The claimant was a no call/no show to the triage appointment. No good cause was found for the noncompliance. (Department Exhibit 7, 10)
8. The claimant was mailed a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) on September 30, 2010, informing her that her FIP benefits would close for three months effective November 1, 2010. (Department Exhibit 1 – 4)
9. The claimant submitted a hearing request on October 18, 2010.

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 (DHS or department) 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 Bridges Reference Manual (BRM).

Department policy states:

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

A Work Eligible Individual (WEI), see BEM 228, who fails, without good cause, to participate in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, must be penalized.

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. BEM 233A, p. 1.

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:

- . 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.

- .. Develop a Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or a Personal Responsibility Plan and Family Contract (PRPFC).
- .. Comply with activities assigned to on the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) or PRPFC.
- .. Appear for a scheduled appointment or meeting related to assigned activities.
- .. Provide legitimate documentation of work participation.
- .. 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. BEM 233A, pp. 1-2.

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. Document the good cause determination in Bridges and the FSSP under the "Participation and Compliance" tab.

See “School Attendance” BEM 201 for good cause when minor parents do not attend school.

Employed 40 Hours

Client Unfit

Good cause includes the following:

- . The person is working at least 40 hours per week on average and earning at least state minimum wage.
- . The client is physically or mentally unfit for the job or activity, as shown by medical evidence or other reliable information. This includes any disability-related limitations that preclude participation in a work and/or self-sufficiency-related activity. The disability-related needs or limitations may not have been identified or assessed prior to the noncompliance.

Illness or Injury

The client has a debilitating illness or injury, or an immediate family member’s illness or injury requires in-home care by the client.

Reasonable Accommodation

The DHS, employment services provider, contractor, agency, or employer failed to make reasonable accommodations for the client’s disability or the client’s needs related to the disability. BEM 233A, pp. 3-4.

No Child Care

The client requested Child Day Care Services (CDC) from DHS, the MWA, or other employment services provider prior to case closure for noncompliance and CDC is needed for a CDC-eligible child, but none is appropriate, suitable, affordable and within reasonable distance of the client’s home or work site.

- . **Appropriate.** The care is appropriate to the child’s age, disabilities and other conditions.

- . **Reasonable distance.** The total commuting time to and from work and child care facilities does not exceed three hours per day.
- . **Suitable provider.** The provider meets applicable state and local standards. Also, providers (e.g., relatives) who are NOT registered/licensed by the DHS Office of Child and Adult Services must meet DHS enrollment requirements for day care aides or relative care providers. See PEM 704.
- . **Affordable.** The child care is provided at the rate of payment or reimbursement offered by DHS.

No Transportation

The client requested transportation services from DHS, the MWA, or other employment services provider prior to case closure and reasonably priced transportation is not available to the client.

Illegal Activities

The employment involves illegal activities.

Discrimination

The client experiences discrimination on the basis of age, race, disability, gender, color, national origin, religious beliefs, etc. BEM 233A, p. 4.

Unplanned Event or Factor

Credible information indicates an unplanned event or factor which likely prevents or significantly interferes with employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities. Unplanned events or factors include, but are not limited to the following:

- . Domestic violence.
- . Health or safety risk.
- . Religion.
- . Homelessness.
- . Jail.
- . Hospitalization.

Comparable Work

The client quits to assume employment comparable in salary and hours. The new hiring must occur before the quit.

Long Commute

Total commuting time exceeds:

- . Two hours per day, NOT including time to and from child care facilities, **or**
- . Three hours per day, including time to and from child care facilities. BEM 233A, pp.4-5.

EFIP

EFIP unless noncompliance is job quit, firing or voluntarily reducing hours of employment.

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.

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 requirement 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.

If the FIS, JET case manager, or MRS counselor do not agree as to whether "good cause" exists for a noncompliance, the case must be forwarded to the immediate supervisors of each party involved to reach an agreement.

DHS must be involved with all triage appointment/phone calls due to program requirements, documentation and tracking.

Note: Clients not participating with JET must be scheduled for a "triage" meeting between the FIS and the client. This does not include applicants. BEM 233A, p. 7.

Good Cause Established

If the client establishes good cause within the negative action period, do **NOT** impose a penalty. See "Good Cause for Noncompliance" earlier in this item. Send the client back to JET, if applicable, after resolving transportation, CDC, or other factors which may have contributed to the good cause. Do not enter a new referral on ASSIST. Enter the good

cause reason on the DHS-71 and on the FSSP under the “Participation and Compliance” tab.

Good Cause NOT Established

If the client does NOT provide a good cause reason within the negative action period, determine good cause based on the best information available. If no good cause exists, allow the case to close. If good cause is determined to exist, delete the negative action. BEM 233A, pp. 10-11.

DEFERRAL DECISIONS

Deferral Not Granted

When a request for deferral is not granted:

- . Document the basis of the decision including any limitations or restrictions in the FSSP under the “Barriers and Referral” tab, **and**
- . Advise and schedule an appointment with JET, **and**
- . Refer the client to JET, providing information on any limitations to full participation.

Advise the client of their right to:

- . Discuss the deferral decision with a supervisor (FIM), **and**
- . File a grievance with the MWA if they disagree with the activities assigned at JET, **and**
- . File a hearing regarding denial of support services such as transportation assistance, child care assistance, etc.

Note: When a deferral is not granted, it is not a loss of benefits, termination, or negative action. When a client requests a hearing based on not being granted a deferral, be sure to advise the client at the pre-hearing conference and use the DHS-3050, Hearing Summary, to inform the Administrative Law Judge the action did not result in a loss of benefits or services. Be sure the client understands that the right time to file a hearing is once they receive a notice of negative action for noncompliance. PEM 230A, pp. 18-19.

Noncompliance is defined by department policy as failing or refusing to do a number of activities, such as attending and participating with WF/JET, completing the FAST survey, completing job applications, participating in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, providing legitimate documentation of work participation, etc. BEM 233A. In this case, the claimant does not dispute that she was noncompliant with WF/JET program requirements. The claimant admits that she did not attend WF/JET for her required 30 hours for the week of September 13, 2010.

The claimant indicates that she believes she had good cause for her noncompliance. Good cause is defined as 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. BEM 233A. The claimant indicates that she has mental and physical disabilities that prevent her from participating with WF/JET. The claimant also testified that her aunt had been killed in a house fire the week of her noncompliance and that she was unable to participate with WF/JET because she was with her family. However, the claimant's medical records were reviewed by the MRT and the claimant was determined to be work ready with some limitations. This means that the claimant would be required to participate with WF/JET within her abilities. WF/JET can develop programs or activities that meet the claimant's limitations. Therefore, once MRT determined the claimant could participate with WF/JET, the claimant was required to attend.

As the claimant did not attend WF/JET, she is noncompliant. The claimant provided no evidence of any specific reason she could not attend WF/JET. The claimant did not attend the triage and present any good cause documentation to the department. The department did receive a Medical Examination Report (DHS-49) on October 7, 2010. However, this was after the notice of case closure had been mailed to the claimant. Further, the Medical Examination Report contained no new conditions to allow the claimant a new determination through the Medical Review Team (MRT).

The claimant testified that the reason she missed her required participation for WF/JET the week of September 13, 2010 was because her aunt died in a house fire. However, the claimant did not call and inform WF/JET of this issue and never presented any documentation to WF/JET to verify any family emergency. The claimant admitted that she did receive the notice of triage and admitted that she did not attend the triage or attempt to reschedule it. The claimant failed to provide any information or documentation to the department to support a good cause finding. Thus, the department had no choice but to find the claimant noncompliant without good cause.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department properly determined the claimant was noncompliant with WF/JET program requirements without good cause.

