

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: 20114418

Issue No: 1038

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Berrien County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Kevin Scully

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge by authority of MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37. Claimant's request for a hearing was received on October 28, 2010. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on Wednesday, January 12, 2011.

ISSUE

Whether the Department of Human Services (Department) properly sanctioned the Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) case for noncompliance with the Jobs, Education, and Training (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 received FIP benefits until November 1, 2010.
2. The Department referred the Claimant to the Jobs, Education, and Training (JET) program as a condition of receiving FIP benefits on August 2, 2010. Another adult member of the Claimant's FIP group, F.M., was also referred to the JET program on August 2, 2010.
3. The Claimant was noncompliant with the JET program on September 13, 2010, when she failed to submit documentation that she had completed her community service.

4. A member of the Claimant's FIP group, F.M., was noncompliant with the JET program on September 13, 2010, when his behavior became disruptive to the program.
5. The Department conducted a triage meeting on October 13, 2010.
6. On October 28, 2010, the Department notified the Claimant that it would terminate her FIP benefits as of November 1, 2010.
7. The Department received the Claimant's request for a hearing on November 28, 2010, protesting the termination of her FIP benefits.

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), Reference Table Manual (RFT), and the Bridges Reference Manual (BRM).

Department policy states that clients must be made aware that public assistance is limited to 48 months to meet their family's needs and that they must take personal responsibility to achieve self-sufficiency. This message, along with information on ways to achieve independence, direct support services, non-compliance penalties, and good cause reasons, is initially shared by DHS when the client applies for cash assistance. Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program requirements, education and training opportunities, and assessments will be covered by the JET case manager when a mandatory JET participant is referred at application. PEM 229, p. 1.

Federal and State laws require each work eligible individual (WEI) in the FIP and RAP group to participate in the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Program or other employment-related activities unless temporarily deferred or engaged in activities that meet participation requirements. These clients must participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities to increase their employability and obtain stable employment. JET is a program administered by the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) through the Michigan Works Agencies (MWAs). The JET program serves employers and job seekers for employers to have skilled workers and job seekers to obtain jobs that provide economic self-sufficiency. A WEI who refuses, without good cause, to participate in assigned employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities is subject to penalties. PEM 230A, p. 1.

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).
 - 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. PEM 233A, pp. 1-2.

The Department is required to send a DHS-2444, Notice of Employment and/or Self-Sufficiency Related Noncompliance within three days after learning of the noncompliance which must include the date of noncompliance, the reason the client

was determined to be noncompliant, the penalty that will be imposed and the triage date within the negative action period. PEM 233A, p. 9

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. If it is determined at triage that the client has good cause, and good cause issues have been resolved, the client should be sent back to JET. PEM 233A, p. 4, 5

Good cause should be determined 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. Good cause must be considered even if the client does not attend, with particular attention to possible disabilities (including disabilities that have not been diagnosed or identified by the client) and unmet needs for accommodation. PEM 233A, p. 9

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 not less than 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 not less than 3 calendar months.
- For the third and subsequent occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for not less than 12 calendar months.
- The penalty counter also begins April 1, 2007 regardless of the previous number of noncompliance penalties. PEM, Item 233A.

Noncompliance, without good cause, with employment requirements for FIP/RAP(SEE PEM 233A) may affect FAP if both programs were active on the date of the FIP noncompliance. PEM 233b, p. 1 The FAP group member should be disqualified 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, and
- The client did not have good cause for the noncompliance. PEM 233B, p.2

The Department should budget the Last FIP grant amount on the FAP budget for the number of months that corresponds with the FIP penalty (either three months for the first two noncompliances or 12 months for the third and subsequent noncompliances) after the FIP case closes for employment and/or self sufficiency-related noncompliance. The Last FIP grant amount is the grant amount the client received immediately before the FIP case closed.

In this case, the Claimant received FIP benefits until November 1, 2010. The Department referred the Claimant and another adult member of her FIP group, F.M., to the JET program. The requirements of the JET program were explained to them on August 2, 2010. The Claimant was noncompliant with the JET program on September 13, 2010, when she failed to submit documentation that she had completed her community service. Another adult member of the Claimant's FIP group, F.M., was also noncompliant with the JET program on September 13, 2010, when his behavior became disruptive to the JET program. The group member, F.M., disrupted the JET program by yelling and using vulgar language while participating in JET activities. A triage meeting was held on October 13, 2010, where the Claimant was given the opportunity to establish good cause for her noncompliance with the JET program as well as the noncompliance of the other group member. The Department did not find good cause, and on October 28, 2010, the Department notified the Claimant that it would sanction her FIP benefits as of November 1, 2010.

The Claimant argued that she did have good cause for her noncompliance with the JET program. The Claimant testified that transportation was a barrier to the completion of her JET assignments. The Claimant testified that the high price of gasoline, and lack of public transportation in here area made it difficult to complete her community service.

The Department's representative testified that the Claimant did not request assistance with transportation. The Claimant testified that she has a vehicle available to her, but it was expensive to use. The cost of gasoline does not establish good cause for the Claimant's noncompliance with the JET program.

The Department's determination that the Claimant did not have good cause for her noncompliance with the JET program is reasonable and the Department established that it acted in accordance with policy when it terminated the Claimant's FIP benefits.

