

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 2011-19700
Issue No: 1038

[REDACTED]

Kent 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 closed Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits?

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 a mandatory Work First/Jobs, Education and Training WF/JET participant. (Hearing Summary).
2. On January 13, 2010, JET referred Claimant to the department and a Triage was requested due to a falsification of job leads. (Department Exhibit 4).
3. On January 18, 2011, the department mailed Claimant a Notice of Noncompliance (DHS-2444), scheduling a Triage meeting for January 18, 2011. (Department Exhibits 2-3).

4. On January 18, 2011, the Triage meeting was held. Claimant received no good cause for failing to provide documentation of good cause. (Department Exhibit 4).
5. On January 26, 2011, the department sent Claimant a Notice of Case Action closing her FIP benefit program and decreasing her FAP benefits because she failed to participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities. (Department Exhibits 14-17).
6. Claimant submitted a hearing request on February 2, 2011, protesting the closure of her FIP case. (Request for a Hearing).
7. This is Claimant's third non-compliance with the FIP and FAP programs. (Department Exhibits 14-17).

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 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 the department when the client applies for cash assistance. Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program requirements, education and training opportunities, and assessments are covered by the JET case manager when a mandatory JET participant is referred at application. BEM 229.

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 Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (DELEG) 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. BEM 230A.

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. BEM 233A.

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. The department coordinates the 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, the client is offered a telephone conference at that time. Clients must comply with triage requirement within the negative action period.

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. BEM 233A.

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. BEM 233A.

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. BEM 233A.

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. BEM 233A.

In this case, Claimant is protesting the closure of her FIP case. Claimant was required to submit job search logs as a condition of receiving her FIP benefits. BAM 115. The department referred Claimant to Triage based on information received from JET that Claimant had falsified her job search logs. During Triage, Claimant submitted a list of the telephone numbers to the managers of the businesses she had applied to, that JET claimed she had falsified. The first manager at the Travelodge was called and verified that Claimant did drop off her resume on January 5, 2011, as she had indicated on her job search logs. At that point, a break was taken and a consultation took place on whether there was a need to continue call the remaining three businesses, since they had just received information that proved Claimant had not submitted fraudulent job search logs. They were instructed to stop calling and find Claimant was non-compliant for not dating her resumes when she dropped them off.

Claimant testified credibly that she did not falsify her job logs. Claimant's testimony was bolstered by department staff during the hearing who agreed that she had attended the Triage with the documentation and telephone numbers to call which proved she did not falsify her job leads. Based on the material and substantial evidence presented during the hearing that Claimant did not falsify her job search leads, this Administrative Law Judge finds the department erred in closing Claimant's FIP case.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department did not establish that Claimant was non-compliant with JET.

Accordingly, the department's actions are REVERSED. The department shall immediately reinstate Claimant's FIP benefits back to the date of closure and issue Claimant all supplementary benefits for FIP and FAP to which she is otherwise entitled.

