

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: 20113634

Issue No: 1038

[REDACTED]
Midland 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 19, 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.
3. The Claimant was noncompliant with the JET program when she failed to complete her JET assignments after September 30, 2010.
4. The Department conducted a triage meeting on October 13, 2010.
5. On October 15, 2010, the Department notified the Claimant that it would terminate her FIP benefits as of November 1, 2010.

6. The Department received the Claimant's request for a hearing on October 19, 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 was an ongoing FIP recipient until November 1, 2010, and the Department had referred her to the JET program as a condition of receiving FIP benefits. The Department has no record of the Claimant being considered for a deferral from the JET program, and the Claimant did not testify that she had applied for one. The Claimant was noncompliant with the JET program when she failed to complete her JET assignments after September 30, 2010. The Department held a triage meeting on October 13, 2010, where the Claimant was given the opportunity to establish good cause for her noncompliance with the JET program. The Claimant attended this meeting, but the Department did not find good cause. The Department notified the Claimant on October 15, 2010, that it would terminate her FIP benefits as of November 1, 2010.

The Claimant argued that she did have good cause for her failure to complete her JET assignments. The Claimant argued that she had a debilitating illness, which prevented her from completing her JET assignment. The Claimant submitted a note from her treating physician, which recommends that the Claimant “not work due to her underlying medical problems.”

Good cause includes situations where the client has a debilitating illness or injury, or an immediate family member’s illness or injury requires in-home care by the client. BEM 233A.

The Claimant does not dispute that she did not attend her assigned JET program activities after September 30, 2010. The Claimant testified that she felt uncomfortable attending JET program activities because of the way certain people treated her there. The Claimant testified that the manner in which she was treated increased her symptoms of severe anxiety, and prevented her from completing her JET assignment.

The Claimant submitted a note from her treating physician as evidence of good cause for her failure to attend JET programming. The note states that the Claimant suffers from diabetes and severe anxiety. The Claimant’s physician recommended that she “not work due to her underlying medical problems.”

However, the note from the Claimant’s physician does not document that the Claimant’s medical problems prevented her from attending the JET program from September 30, 2010, through October 5, 2010. The note does not indicate whether the Claimant could perform her JET program assignments if provided any reasonable accommodations.

This Administrative Law Judge finds that there was insufficient evidence submitted during the hearing to establish that the Claimant had good cause due to debilitating illness or injury for her noncompliance with the JET program.

