

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 20115097

Issue No: 1038

Case No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

March 2, 2011

Kent 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 September 30, 2010. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on Wednesday, March 2, 2011, and the Claimant's husband participated in the hearing.

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 was an ongoing FIP recipient.
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 on August 30, 2010, after failing to attend her JET programming since August 24, 2010.
4. The Department conducted a triage meeting on September 22, 2010.

5. On September 22, 2010, the Department notified the Claimant that it would sanction her FIP benefits as of October 4, 2010.
6. The Department received the Claimant's request for a hearing on September 30, 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.

The Claimant was an ongoing FIP recipient, and the Department had referred her to the JET program as a condition of receiving FIP benefits. The Claimant and her husband were noncompliant with the JET program on August 30, 2010, after failing to attend JET programming since August 24, 2010. The Department conducted a triage meeting on September 22, 2010, where the Claimant was given the opportunity to establish good cause for her noncompliance. The Department did not find good cause, and the Department sanctioned the Claimant’s FIP benefits.

The Claimant argued that she and her husband had good cause for their noncompliance with the JET program. The Claimant testified that she suffers from depression, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. During the hearing, the Claimant offered a statement signed by her treating physician on January 7, 2011. The statement states that the Claimant suffered from a depression episode in August of 2010, and September of 2010, and that she should be excused from the JET program. The Claimant's husband, testified that he suffers from high blood pressure. During the hearing, the Claimant offered a Medical Needs form (DHS-54A) that was signed by a physician's assistant on January 24, 2011. The form indicates that the dosage of his prescription medication had been too high, and that he was unable to attend the JET program in August of 2010, and September of 2010.

The Department considered the Claimant's good cause argument during the triage meeting held on September 22, 2010. The Department did not find good cause in this case because the Claimant and her husband were unable to verify the medical conditions that prevented them from completing their JET assignments. The Department's representative testified that the Claimant was given twelve days from the triage meeting to submit verification supporting her claim of good cause. When the Department did not receive any verification, it sanctioned the Claimant's FIP benefits.

The Claimant submitted medical documentation during the administrative hearing supporting her claim of good cause for herself and her husband. The verification documents were not available when the triage meeting was held.

However, no evidence was presented during the hearing that the Claimant did not have a reasonable opportunity to obtain and submit verification documents either at the triage meeting, or within twelve days of the triage meeting.

Based on the evidence and testimony available during the hearing, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the Department provided the Claimant with a fair and reasonable opportunity to establish good cause during the triage meeting on September 22, 2010. The Department's determination that the Claimant and her husband did not have good cause for their noncompliance with the JET program was based on the information available during that meeting. This Administrative Law Judge finds that the Department's good cause determination was reasonable. The Department has established that it acted in accordance with policy when it sanctioned the Claimant's FIP benefits for noncompliance with the JET program.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the Department acted in accordance with policy when it sanctioned the Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) case for noncompliance with the Jobs, Education, and Training (JET) program.

The Department's FIP sanction is AFFIRMED. It is SO ORDERED.

/s/ _____
Kevin Scully
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura D. Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: March 9, 2011

Date Mailed: March 9, 2011

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 60 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.

KS/tg

cc:

