

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

**IN THE MATTER OF:**

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 2011-8719  
Issue No.: 2009  
Case No.: [REDACTED]  
Hearing Date: March 7, 2011  
DHS County: Monroe

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:** Colleen M. Mamelka

**HEARING DECISION**

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon the Claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a hearing was held in Monroe, Michigan, on Monday, March 7, 2011. The Claimant appeared and testified. The Claimant was represented by [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] appeared on behalf of the Department of Human Services ("Department").

During the hearing, the Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision, in order to allow for the submission of additional medical records. The records were received, reviewed, and entered as Exhibits 4 and 5. This matter is now before the undersigned for a final determination.

**ISSUE**

Whether the Department properly determined that the Claimant was not disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance ("MA-P") benefit program?

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the competent, material, and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

1. The Claimant submitted an application for public assistance seeking MA-P benefits on June 30, 2010.
2. On September 2, 2010, the Medical Review Team ("MRT") found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 1, pp. 9, 10)

3. On September 8, 2010, the Department notified the Claimant of the MRT determination. (Exhibit 1, pp. 5 – 8)
4. On November 19, 2010, the Department received the Claimant's written request for hearing. (Exhibit 1, p. 4)
5. On December 20, 2010, the State Hearing Review Team ("SHRT") found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 3)
6. The Claimant has not alleged any physical disabling impairment(s).
7. The Claimant alleged mental disabling impairments due to a learning disability and depression.
8. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 32 years old with a [REDACTED], date of birth; was 5'11" in height; and weighed 150 pounds.
9. The Claimant is a high school graduate under a special education program with a limited employment history of sweeping floors at a factory and as a cook at a fast food restaurant.
10. The Claimant's impairments have lasted, or are expected to last, continuously for a period of 12 months or longer.

### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

The Medical Assistance ("MA") program is established by Subchapter XIX of Chapter 7 of The Public Health & Welfare Act, 42 USC 1397, and is administered by the Department, formerly known as the Family Independence Agency, pursuant to MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual ("BAM"), the Bridges Eligibility Manual ("BEM"), and the Bridges Reference Manual ("BRM").

Disability is defined as the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months. 20 CFR 416.905(a). The person claiming a physical or mental disability has the burden to establish it through the use of competent medical evidence from qualified medical sources such as his or her medical history, clinical/laboratory findings, diagnosis/prescribed treatment, prognosis for recovery and/or medical assessment of ability to do work-related activities or ability to reason and make appropriate mental adjustments, if a mental disability is alleged. 20 CFR 413.913. An

individual's subjective pain complaints are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.929(a). Similarly, conclusory statements by a physician or mental health professional that an individual is disabled or blind, absent supporting medical evidence, is insufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.927.

When determining disability, the federal regulations require several factors to be considered including: (1) the location/duration/frequency/intensity of an applicant's pain; (2) the type/dosage/effectiveness/side effects of any medication the applicant takes to relieve pain; (3) any treatment other than pain medication that the applicant has received to relieve pain; and, (4) the effect of the applicant's pain on his or her ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(3). The applicant's pain must be assessed to determine the extent of his or her functional limitation(s) in light of the objective medical evidence presented. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(2).

In order to determine whether or not an individual is disabled, federal regulations require a five-step sequential evaluation process be utilized. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(1). The five-step analysis requires the trier of fact to consider an individual's current work activity; the severity of the impairment(s) both in duration and whether it meets or equals a listed impairment in Appendix 1; residual functional capacity to determine whether an individual can perform past relevant work; and residual functional capacity along with vocational factors (e.g., age, education, and work experience) to determine if an individual can adjust to other work. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945.

If an individual is found disabled, or not disabled, at any step, a determination or decision is made with no need to evaluate subsequent steps. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). If a determination cannot be made that an individual is disabled, or not disabled, at a particular step, the next step is required. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). If an impairment does not meet or equal a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed before moving from Step 3 to Step 4. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945. Residual functional capacity is the most an individual can do despite the limitations based on all relevant evidence. 20 CFR 945(a)(1). An individual's residual functional capacity assessment is evaluated at both Steps 4 and 5. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). In determining disability, an individual's functional capacity to perform basic work activities is evaluated and if found that the individual has the ability to perform basic work activities without significant limitation, disability will not be found. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv). In general, the individual has the responsibility to prove disability. 20 CFR 416.912(a). An impairment or combination of impairments is not severe if it does not significantly limit an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.921(a). The individual has the responsibility to provide evidence of prior work experience; efforts to work; and any other factor showing how the impairment affects the ability to work. 20 CFR 416.912(c)(3)(5)(6).

In addition to the above, when evaluating mental impairments, a special technique is utilized. 20 CFR 416.920a(a). First, an individual's pertinent symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings are evaluated to determine whether a medically determinable mental impairment exists. 20 CFR 416.920a(b)(1). When a medically determinable mental impairment is established, the symptoms, signs and laboratory findings that substantiate the impairment are documented to include the individual's significant history, laboratory findings, and functional limitations. 20 CFR 416.920a(e)(2). Functional limitation(s) is assessed based upon the extent to which the impairment(s) interferes with an individual's ability to function independently, appropriately, effectively, and on a sustained basis. *Id.*; 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(2). Chronic mental disorders, structured settings, medication and other treatment, and the effect on the overall degree of functionality are considered. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(1). In addition, four broad functional areas (activities of daily living; social functioning; concentration, persistence or pace; and episodes of decompensation) are considered when determining an individual's degree of functional limitation. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(3). The degree of limitation for the first three functional areas is rated by a five point scale: none, mild, moderate, marked, and extreme. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(4). A four point scale (none, one or two, three, four or more) is used to rate the degree of limitation in the fourth functional area. *Id.* The last point on each scale represents a degree of limitation that is incompatible with the ability to do any gainful activity. *Id.*

After the degree of functional limitation is determined, the severity of the mental impairment is determined. 20 CFR 416.920a(d). If severe, a determination of whether the impairment meets or is the equivalent of a listed mental disorder is made. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(2). If the severe mental impairment does not meet (or equal) a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(3).

As outlined above, the first step looks at the individual's current work activity. In the record presented, the Claimant is not involved in substantial gainful activity and, therefore, is not ineligible for disability benefits under Step 1.

The severity of the claimant's alleged impairment(s) is considered under Step 2. The claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairments. In order to be considered disabled for MA purposes, the impairment must be severe. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(b). An impairment, or combination of impairments, is severe if it significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities regardless of age, education and work experience. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(c). Basic work activities means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. 20 CFR 916.921(b). Examples include:

1. Physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling;
2. Capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking;
3. Understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions;
4. Use of judgment;
5. Responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations; and
6. Dealing with changes in a routine work setting.

*Id.*

The second step allows for dismissal of a disability claim obviously lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v Bowen*, 880 F2d 860, 862 (CA 6, 1988). The severity requirement may still be employed as an administrative convenience to screen out claims that are totally groundless solely from a medical standpoint. *Id.* at 863 citing *Farris v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 773 F2d 85, 90 n.1 (CA 6, 1985). An impairment qualifies as non-severe only if, regardless of a claimant's age, education, or work experience, the impairment would not affect the claimant's ability to work. *Salmi v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 774 F2d 685, 692 (CA 6, 1985).

In the present case, the Claimant alleges disability due to a learning disability and depression. In support of his claim, some school records were submitted which document the Claimant's academic struggle in school.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant presented to the emergency room with complaints of depression and suicidal ideation. The Claimant was treated and discharged in stable condition.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant was diagnosed with developmental disability and mild mental retardation.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a mental status examination. The Claimant had limitations in communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, and self-

direction. The Axis II diagnosis was mild mental retardation with a Global Assessment Functioning (“GAF”) of 41.

On [REDACTED] a letter was written by a Psychology Intern stating that the Claimant would benefit from further evaluation, reporting symptoms of disrupted sleep pattern, low energy level, fatigue, difficulty making decisions, mood swings, impulsiveness, nervousness, irritability, difficulty following directions, and isolation.

On [REDACTED], a Psychiatric/Psychological Medical Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The diagnosis was learning disorder with a GAF of 50. The prognosis was moderate.

On [REDACTED], a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The diagnoses were mild mental retardation and depression. The physical examination was normal. Regarding mental limitations, the physician recommended further neuropsychological testing.

On [REDACTED], a Psychiatric/Psychological Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The mental status evaluation revealed poor memory and judgment, poor comprehension and abstract reasoning, depression, and anxiety. The diagnosis was mild mental retardation with a GAF of 35. The Mental Residual functional Capacity Assessment was also completed. The Claimant was markedly limited in his ability to understand, remember, and carry out detailed instructions as well as his ability to accept instruction and respond appropriately to criticism from supervisors. The Claimant was moderately limited in 15 of the 20 factors.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a consultative examination. The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – Fourth Edition (“WAIS-IV”) was administered. The Claimant’s full scale IQ was 74. The diagnosis was history of learning disability with a GAF of 50 and a guarded prognosis. The Psychologist opined that the Claimant’s ability to understand and follow simple directions and perform basic, routine, repetitive tasks was mildly impaired. His ability to interact with co-workers, supervisors, and the public was adequate. The Claimant was unable to manage benefit funds.

As previously noted, the Claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairment(s). As summarized above, the Claimant has presented some medical evidence establishing that he does have some physical and mental limitations on his ability to perform basic work activities. The medical evidence has established that the Claimant has an impairment, or combination thereof, that has more than a *de minimis* effect on the Claimant’s basic work activities. Further, the impairments have lasted continuously for twelve months; therefore, the Claimant is not disqualified from receipt of MA-P benefits under Step 2.

In the third step of the sequential analysis of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the Claimant's impairment, or combination of impairments, is listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. The Claimant has alleged mental disabling impairments due to a learning disability and depression.

Listing 12.00 encompasses adult mental disorders. The evaluation of disability on the basis of mental disorders requires documentation of a medically determinable impairment(s) and consideration of the degree in which the impairment limits the individual's ability to work, and whether these limitations have lasted or are expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months. 12.00A. The existence of a medically determinable impairment(s) of the required duration must be established through medical evidence consisting of symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings, to include psychological test findings. 12.00B. The evaluation of disability on the basis of a mental disorder requires sufficient evidence to (1) establish the presence of a medically determinable mental impairment(s), (2) assess the degree of functional limitation the impairment(s) imposes, and (3) project the probable duration of the impairment(s). 12.00D. The evaluation of disability on the basis of mental disorders requires documentation of a medically determinable impairment(s) and consideration of the degree in which the impairment limits the individual's ability to work, and whether these limitations have lasted or are expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months. 12.00A.

Listing 12.04 defines affective disorders as being characterized by a disturbance of mood, accompanied by a full or partial manic or depressive syndrome. Generally, affective disorders involve either depression or elation. The required level of severity for these disorders is met when the requirements of both A and B are satisfied, or when the requirements in C are satisfied.

- A. Medically documented persistence, either continuous or intermittent, of one of the following:
  - 1. Depressive syndrome characterized by at least four of the following:
    - a. Anhedonia or pervasive loss of interest in almost all activities; or
    - b. Appetite disturbance with change in weight; or
    - c. Sleep disturbance; or
    - d. Psychomotor agitation or retardation; or
    - e. Decreased energy; or
    - f. Feelings of guilt or worthlessness; or

- g. Difficulty concentrating or thinking; or
  - h. Thoughts of suicide; or
  - i. Hallucinations, delusions, or paranoid thinking; or
2. Manic syndrome characterized by at least three of the following:
- a. Hyperactivity; or
  - b. Pressure of speech; or
  - c. Flight of ideas; or
  - d. Inflated self-esteem; or
  - e. Decreased need for sleep; or
  - f. Easy distractability; or
  - g. Involvement in activities that have a high probability of painful consequences which are not recognized; or
  - h. Hallucinations, delusions, or paranoid thinking; or
3. Bipolar syndrome with a history of episodic periods manifested by the full symptomatic picture of both manic and depressive syndromes (and currently characterized by either or both syndromes);

AND

- B. Resulting in at least two of the following:
- 1. Marked restriction on activities of daily living; or
  - 2. Marked difficulties in maintaining social functioning; or
  - 3. Marked difficulties in maintaining concentration, persistence, or pace; or
  - 4. Repeated episodes of decompensation, each of extended duration;

OR

- C. Medically documented history of chronic affective disorder of at least 2 years' duration that has caused more than a minimal limitation of ability to do basic work activities, with symptoms or signs currently attenuated by medication or psychosocial support, and one of the following:
- 1. Repeated episodes of decompensation, each of extended duration; or
  - 2. A residual disease process that has resulted in such marginal adjustment that even minimal increase in mental demands or

change in the environment would be predicted to cause the individual to decompensate; or

3. Current history of 1 or more years' inability to function outside a highly supportive living arrangement, with an indication of continued need for such an arrangement.

Listing 12.05 discusses mental retardation which refers to significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning with deficits in adaptive functioning initially manifested during the developmental period. The required level of severity for this disorder is met when the requirements in A, B, C, or D are satisfied.

- A. Mental incapacity evidenced by dependence upon others for personal needs (e.g., toileting, eating, dressing, or bathing) and inability to follow directions, such that the use of standardized measures of intellectual functioning is precluded;

OR

- B. A valid verbal, performance, or full scale IQ of 59 or less;

OR

- C. A valid verbal, performance, or full scale IQ of 60 through 70 and a physical or other mental impairment imposing an additional and significant work-related limitation of function;

OR

- D. A valid verbal, performance, or full scale IQ of 60 through 70, resulting in at least two of the following:
  1. Marked restriction of activities of daily living; or \
  2. Marked difficulties in maintaining social functioning; or
  3. Marked difficulties in maintaining concentration, persistence, or pace; or
  4. Repeated episodes of decompensation, each of extended duration.

In this case, the objective findings demonstrate that the Claimant has disrupted sleep pattern, low energy level, difficulty making decisions or following directions, and thoughts of suicide. The Claimant's GAF scores ranged between 35 and 50. A GAF of 50 means serious symptoms OR any serious impairment in social, occupational, or school functioning, while a GAF of 35 equates to impairment in reality testing or

communication OR major impairment in several areas, such as work or school, family relations, judgment, thinking, or mood. In addition, the Claimant has been unable to function outside of a highly supportive living arrangement (noting his inability to live independently) his entire life. In light of the foregoing and in consideration of the Claimant's mental retardation, it is found that the Claimant meets, or is the medical equivalent thereof, a listed impairment within 12.00, specifically, 12.04. Accordingly, the Claimant is found disabled at Step 3 with no further analysis required.

In some circumstances, benefit payments can, or must, be restricted to someone other than the individual (program group). BAM 420. A protective payee is a person/agency selected to be responsible for receiving and managing the cash assistance on behalf of the individual (program group) as a third party. *Id.* Restricted payments are required in any of the following circumstances:

- Court-ordered shelter arrearage collection
- Third-party resource disqualification
- Minor parent
- Substance abuse
- Client convicted of a drug-related felony
- Money mismanagement
- A child(ren) receiving FIP has a legal guardian
- Eviction or threatened eviction

*Id.* Restricted payment status is reviewed when appropriate but at least at every determination. *Id.* The client has the right to request and be granted a review of the restricted payment status every six months. *Id.* An individual (group) may request a hearing to dispute a decision to begin or continue restricted payments or dispute the selection of a protected payee. *Id.* Restricted payments are continued until the hearing matter is resolved. *Id.*

### **DECISION AND ORDER**

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the above findings of fact and conclusions of law finds the Claimant disabled for purposes of the MA-P benefit program.

Accordingly, it is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall process the June 30, 2010, application to determine if all other non-medical criteria are met and inform the Claimant and his Authorized Representative of the determination in accordance with Department policy.

3. The Department shall, in light of the Claimant's cognitive functioning, evaluate the need for a protective payee (if Claimant seeks SDA benefits) in accordance with Department policy.
4. The Department shall supplement for any lost benefits (if any) that the Claimant was entitled to receive if otherwise eligible and qualified in accordance with Department policy.
5. The Department shall review the Claimant's continued eligibility in June 2012 in accordance with Department policy.

*Colleen M. Mamelka*

**Colleen M. Mamelka**

Administrative Law Judge  
For Maura Corrigan, Director  
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: May 12, 2011

Date Mailed: May 16, 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 90 days of the filing of the original request.

The Claimant may appeal the Decision and Order to Circuit Court within 30 days of the mailing 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.

CMM/pf

cc:

