

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 2012-46813
Issue No.: 4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: August 1, 2012
County: Wayne (18)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Susan C. Burke

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. After due notice, a hearing was conducted in Taylor, Michigan on August 1, 2012. Claimant appeared and testified. Claimant was represented by [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] appeared on behalf of the Department of Human Services ("Department").

During the hearing, Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision in order to allow for the submission of additional medical records. The evidence was received, reviewed, and forwarded to the State Hearing Review Team ("SHRT") for consideration. On October 8, 2012, this office received the SHRT determination which found Claimant not disabled. This matter is now before the undersigned for a final decision.

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined that Claimant was not disabled for purposes of the State Disability Assistance ("SDA") 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. Claimant submitted an application for public assistance seeking SDA benefits on January 10, 2012.

2. On March 26, 2012, the Medical Review Team (MRT) determined that Claimant was not disabled.
3. The Department notified Claimant of the MRT determination on March 28, 2012.
4. On April 13, 2012, the Department received Claimant's timely written request for hearing.
5. On August 20, 2012, SHRT found Claimant not disabled.
6. During the hearing, Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision in order to allow for the submission of additional medical records. The evidence was received, reviewed and forwarded to SHRT for consideration. On October 8, 2012, this office received the SHRT determination which found Claimant not disabled.
7. At the time of the hearing, the Claimant was 47 years old with a birth date of [REDACTED]
8. Claimant has a high school education and some college education.
9. Claimant is not currently working.
10. Claimant has a work history as a union construction worker.
11. Claimant suffers from lumbar disc herniation, left lumbar radiculopathy and lumbar degenerative disc disease.
12. Claimant's impairments have lasted, or are expected to last, continuously for a period of twelve months or longer.
13. Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning her impairments and limitations, when considered in light of all objective medical evidence, as well as the record as a whole, reflect an individual who is so impaired as to be incapable of engaging in any substantial gainful activity on a regular and continuing basis.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program which provides financial assistance for disabled persons is established by 2004 PA 344. The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3151-400.3180. Department policies are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Reference Tables Manual (RFT).

A person is considered disabled for purposes of SDA if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards for at least 90 days. Receipt of SSI or RSDI benefits based upon disability or blindness or the receipt of MA benefits based upon disability or blindness (MA-P) automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program. Other specific financial and non-financial eligibility criteria are found in BEM Item 261.

Federal regulations require that the Department use the same operative definition for "disabled" as used for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) under Title XVI of the Social Security Act. 42 CFR 435.540(a).

"Disability" is:

...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.

In determining whether an individual is disabled, 20 CFR 416.920 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activity, the severity of the impairment(s), statutory listings of medical impairments, residual functional capacity, and vocational factors (i.e., age, education, and work experience) are assessed in that order. When a determination that an individual is or is not disabled can be made at any step in the sequential evaluation, evaluation under a subsequent step is not necessary.

First, the trier of fact must determine if the individual is working and if the work is substantial gainful activity. (SGA) 20 CFR 416.920(b).

In this case, Claimant is not currently working. Claimant testified credibly that he is not currently working and the Department presented no contradictory evidence. Therefore, Claimant may not be disqualified for SDA at this step in the sequential evaluation process.

Second, in order to be considered disabled for purposes of SDA, a person must have a severe impairment. 20 CFR 416.920(c). A severe impairment is an impairment expected to last twelve months or more (or result in death) which significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to perform basic work activities. The term "basic work activities" means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. Examples of these 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. 20 CFR 416.921(b).

The purpose of the second step in the sequential evaluation process is to screen out claims lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v. Bowen* 880 F2d 860, 862 (6th Cir, 1988). As a result, the Department may only screen out claims at this level which are “totally groundless” solely from a medical standpoint. The *Higgs* court used the severity requirement as a “*de minimus* hurdle” in the disability determination. The *de minimus* standard is a provision of a law that allows the court to disregard trifling matters.

In this case, medical evidence has clearly established that Claimant has an impairment (or combination of impairments) that has more than a minimal effect on Claimant’s work activities. Claimant was diagnosed with lumbar disc herniation, left lumbar radiculopathy and lumbar degenerative disc disease (CL-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, meets or medically equals the criteria of an impairment listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. (20 CFR 416.920 (d), 416.925, and 416.926.) This Administrative Law Judge finds that the Claimant’s medical record will not support a finding that Claimant’s impairment(s) is a “listed impairment” or is medically equal to a listed impairment. See Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404, Part A.

In the present case, Claimant alleged disability due to lumbar disc herniation, left lumbar radiculopathy and lumbar degenerative disc disease.

This Administrative Law Judge consulted all listings, including 1.00 Musculoskeletal System. The medical records do not support a finding that Claimant can be found to be disabled based upon medical evidence alone. 20 CFR 416.920(d).

In the fourth step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the Claimant has the residual functional capacity (RFC) to perform the requirements of Claimant's past relevant work. 20 CFR 416.920(a) (4) (iv).

An individual's residual functional capacity is the individual's ability to do physical and mental work activities on a sustained basis despite limitations from the individual's impairments. Residual functional capacity is assessed based on impairment(s), and any related symptoms, such as pain, which may cause physical and mental limitations that affect what can be done in a work setting. Residual functional capacity is the most that can be done, despite the limitations. In making this finding, the trier of fact must consider all of the Claimant's impairments, including impairments that are not severe (20 CFR 416.920 (e) and 416.945; SSR 96-8p.) Further, a residual functional capacity assessment must be based on all relevant evidence in the case record, such as medical history, laboratory findings, the effects of treatments (including limitations or restrictions imposed by the mechanics of treatment), reports of daily activities, lay evidence, recorded observations, medical treating source statements, effects of symptoms (including pain) that are reasonably attributed to the impairment, and evidence from attempts to work. SSR 96-8p.

The term past relevant work means work performed (either as Claimant actually performed it or as it is generally performed in the national economy) within the last fifteen years or fifteen years prior to the date that disability must be established. In addition, the work must have lasted long enough for the Claimant to learn to do the job and have been substantially gainfully employed (20 CFR 416.960 (b) and 416.965.) If Claimant has the residual functional capacity to do Claimant's past relevant work, Claimant is not disabled. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3). If Claimant is unable to do any past relevant work or does not have any past relevant work, the analysis proceeds to the fifth and last step.

The medical information indicates that Claimant suffers from lumbar disc herniation, left lumbar radiculopathy and lumbar degenerative disc disease (CL-2)

Claimant's past relevant work included union construction work. Given the functional requirements as stated by Claimant for this type of work, (which is consistent with this type of work) and Claimant's functional limitations as described above, this Administrative Law Judge concludes that Claimant does not retain the capacity to perform his past relevant work.

In the fifth step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the Claimant's impairment(s) prevents Claimant from doing other work. 20 CFR 416.920(f). This determination is based upon the Claimant's:

- (1) residual functional capacity defined simply as “what can you still do despite your limitations?” 20 CFR 416.945;
- (2) age, education, and work experience, 20 CFR 416.963-.965; and
- (3) the kinds of work which exist in significant numbers in the national economy which the Claimant could perform despite his/her limitations. 20 CFR 416.966.

See *Felton v DSS*, 161 Mich. App 690, 696 (1987) . Once Claimant reaches Step 5 in the sequential review process, Claimant has already established a *prima facie* case of disability. *Richardson v Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 735 F2d 962 (6th Cir, 1984). At that point, the burden of proof is on the state to prove by substantial evidence that the Claimant has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity.

For the purpose of determining the exertional requirements of work in the national economy, jobs are classified as “sedentary”, “light”, “medium”, “heavy”, and “very heavy.” 20 CFR 416.967. These terms have the same meaning as are used in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* . Sedentary work involves lifting of no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. 20 CFR 416.967(a) Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. *Id.* Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing up to 10 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(b) Even though weight lifted may be very little, a job is in this category when it requires a good deal of walking or standing, or when it involves sitting most of the time with some pushing and pulling of arm or leg controls. *Id.* To be considered capable of performing a full or wide range of light work, an individual must have the ability to do substantially all of these activities. *Id.* An individual capable of light work is also capable of sedentary work, unless there are additionally limiting factors such as loss of fine dexterity or inability to sit for long periods of time. *Id.* Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(c) An individual capable of performing medium work is also capable of light and sedentary work. *Id.* Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(d) An individual capable of heavy work is also capable of medium, light, and sedentary work. *Id.* Finally, very heavy work involves lifting objects weighing more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing 50 pounds or more. 20 CFR 416.967(e) An individual capable of very heavy work is able to perform work under all categories. *Id.*

Limitations or restrictions which affect the ability to meet the demands of jobs other than strength demands (exertional requirements, i.e. sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, or pulling) are considered nonexertional. 20 CFR 416.969a(a) In considering whether an individual can perform past relevant work, a comparison of the individual's residual functional capacity with the demands of past relevant work. *Id.* If an individual can no longer do past relevant work the same residual functional capacity assessment along with an individual's age, education, and work experience is considered to determine whether an individual can adjust to other work which exists in the national economy. *Id.* Examples of non-exertional limitations or restrictions include difficulty function due to nervousness, anxiousness, or depression; difficulty maintaining attention or concentration; difficulty understanding or remembering detailed instructions; difficulty in seeing or hearing; difficulty tolerating some physical feature(s) of certain work settings (i.e. can't tolerate dust or fumes); or difficulty performing the manipulative or postural functions of some work such as reaching, handling, stooping, climbing, crawling, or crouching. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(1)(i) – (vi) If the impairment(s) and related symptoms, such as pain, only affect the ability to perform the non-exertional aspects of work-related activities, the rules in Appendix 2 do not direct factual conclusions of disabled or not disabled. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(2) The determination of whether disability exists is based upon the principles in the appropriate sections of the regulations, giving consideration to the rules for specific case situations in Appendix 2. *Id.*

In order to evaluate the Claimant's skills and to help determine the existence in the national economy of work the Claimant is able to do, occupations are classified as unskilled, semiskilled and skilled. SSR 86-8.

Claimant is forty-seven years old, with a high school education and some college education, and a history of unskilled work as a construction worker, (20 CFR. 416.968 (c)) performed at the medium to heavy level. (20 CFR 416.967). Claimant first suffered from back strain in May of 2008. Claimant has since undergone surgery to correct his back, but as of July 12, 2012, still suffers from lumbar post-laminectomy syndrome, s/p L4-S1 fusion and lumbar /thoracic radiculitis. (CL-11) Claimant's medical records are consistent with Claimant's testimony that Claimant is unable to engage in even a full range of sedentary work. See Social Security Ruling 83-10; *Wilson v Heckler*, 743 F2d 216 (1986). Claimant testified credibly that he cannot sit or stand from more than fifteen minutes without being overcome with pain.

The Department has failed to provide vocational evidence which establishes that the Claimant has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity and that given Claimant's age, education, and work experience, there are significant numbers of jobs in the national economy which the Claimant could perform despite Claimant's

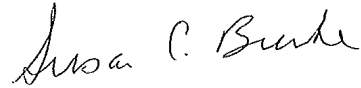
limitations. Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge concludes that Claimant is disabled for purposes of the SDA program.

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 SDA benefit programs, as of May 14, 2008.

Accordingly, it is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall initiate processing of the January 10, 2012 application to determine if all other non-medical criteria are met and inform the Claimant of the determination in accordance with Department policy.
3. The Department shall supplement for any lost benefits that the Claimant was entitled to receive if otherwise eligible, in accordance with Department policy.
4. The Department shall review the Claimant's continued eligibility in November of 2013, in accordance with Department policy.



Susan C. Burke
Administrative Law Judge
For Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: October 15, 2012

Date Mailed: October 15, 2012

NOTICE: Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS) 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. MAHS 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. (60 days for FAP cases)

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 mailing date of the rehearing decision.

Claimant may request a rehearing or reconsideration for the following reasons:

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- A rehearing **MAY** be granted if there is newly discovered evidence that could affect the outcome of the original hearing decision.
- A reconsideration **MAY** be granted for any of the following reasons:
 - misapplication of manual policy or law in the hearing decision,
 - typographical errors, mathematical error, or other obvious errors in the hearing decision that effect the substantial rights of the claimant:
 - the failure of the ALJ to address other relevant issues in the hearing decision.

Request must be submitted through the local DHS office or directly to MAHS by mail at
Michigan Administrative hearings

Re consideration/Rehearing Request
P. O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-07322

SCB/ctl

cc:

Wayne County DHS (18)/1843