

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 201239818
Issue No.: 3052
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: June 6, 2012
County: Genesee DHS (02)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Christian Gardocki

HEARING DECISION FOR INTENTIONAL PROGRAM VIOLATION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon a request for a hearing by the Department of Human Services (DHS). After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on June 6, 2012 from Detroit, Michigan. The Department was represented by [REDACTED], Regulation Agent for the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The hearing was held in Respondent's absence pursuant to 7 CFR 273.16(e), Mich Admin Code R 400.3130(5), or Mich Admin Code R 400.3187(5).

ISSUES

The first issue is whether Respondent committed an Intentional Program Violation (IPV).

The second issue is whether Respondent received an overissuance of benefits which may be recovered through debt collection procedures.

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

1. Over the period of 10/2010-3/2011, Respondent was an ongoing FAP benefit recipient through the State of Michigan.
2. Over the period of 8/29/10-3/25/11, Respondent spent the Michigan issued FAP benefits in [REDACTED].
3. Over the period of 10/2010-3/2011, Respondent received FAP benefits totaling \$1200.

4. On 3/16/12, DHS requested a hearing to establish that Respondent committed an IPV, is subject to an IPV disqualification and to establish a debt against Respondent for \$1200.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Food Assistance Program (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) is established by the Food Stamp Act of 1977, as amended, and is implemented by the federal regulations contained in Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). DHS administers the FAP pursuant to Michigan Compiled Laws 400.10, *et seq.*, and Michigan Administrative Code R 400.3001-3015. DHS regulations are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Reference Tables Manual (RFT). Updates to DHS regulations are found in the Bridges Policy Bulletin (BPB).

This hearing was requested by DHS, in part, to establish that Respondent committed an IPV. DHS may request a hearing to establish an IPV and disqualification. BAM 600 at 3.

Suspected IPV means an OI exists for which all three of the following conditions exist:

- The client intentionally failed to report information or intentionally gave incomplete or inaccurate information needed to make a correct benefit determination, and
- The client was clearly and correctly instructed regarding his or her reporting responsibilities, and
- The client has no apparent physical or mental impairment that limits his or her understanding or ability to fulfill their reporting responsibilities. BAM 720 at 1.

IPV is suspected when there is **clear and convincing** (emphasis added) evidence that the client or CDC provider has intentionally withheld or misrepresented information for the purpose of establishing, maintaining, increasing or preventing reduction of program benefits or eligibility. BAM 720 at 1. A clear and convincing threshold to establish IPV is a higher standard than a preponderance of evidence standard and less than a beyond any reasonable doubt standard. It is a standard which requires reasonable certainty of the truth; something that is highly probable. Black's Law Dictionary 888 (6th ed. 1990).

The Code of Federal Regulations defines an IPV. Intentional program violations shall consist of having intentionally: (1) made a false or misleading statement, or misrepresented, concealed or withheld facts; or (2) committed any act that constitutes a violation of the Food Stamp Act, the Food Stamp Program Regulations, or any State statute for the purpose of using, presenting, transferring, acquiring, receiving, possessing or trafficking of coupons, authorization cards or reusable documents used as part of an automated benefit delivery system. 7 CFR 273.16(c).

The client/authorized representative (AR) is determined to have committed an IPV by:

- A court decision.
- An administrative hearing decision.

- The client signing a DHS-826, Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing or DHS-830, Disqualification Consent Agreement or other recoupment and disqualification agreement forms. *Id.*

There is no evidence that Respondent signed a DHS-826 or DHS-830. There is also no evidence that a court decision found Respondent responsible for an IPV. Thus, DHS seeks to establish an IPV via administrative hearing.

To be eligible for FAP benefits, a person must be a Michigan resident. BEM 220 at 1. A person is considered a resident while living in Michigan for any purpose other than a vacation, even if there is no intent to remain in the state permanently or indefinitely. *Id.* Eligible persons may include persons who entered the state with a job commitment or to seek employment or students (this includes students living at home during a school break.) *Id.*

It was not disputed that Respondent exclusively spent State of Michigan issued FAP benefits in Florida for the period of 8/29/10-3/25/11 (see Exhibits 22-23). DHS contended that Respondent's use of FAP benefits outside of Michigan for an approximate six month period was sufficient to establish that Respondent was not a resident of Michigan for the period of 10/2010-3/2011. Accepting that Respondent gave up Michigan residency, DHS contended that Respondent purposely failed to report a stoppage in Michigan residency to DHS, thereby committing fraud.

At some point when a person leaves the State of Michigan, it is reasonable to expect that person to report the change in residency to DHS. An approximate six month period seems to be long enough of a period that would lead a reasonable person to report a change in residency to DHS. This evidence was somewhat persuasive that Respondent committed fraud.

It is plausible that Respondent reported a change in residency but DHS failed to act on Respondent's reporting. DHS did not present any written statement from Respondent which claimed residency in Michigan during a period when Respondent was known to be outside of Michigan. DHS also could not provide evidence of a verifiable reporting system that established the failure to change Respondent's address was the fault of Respondent. This is supportive of finding that Respondent did not commit fraud.

DHS acknowledged that Respondent did not receive FAP benefits from the State of [REDACTED] during the period of 10/2010-3/2011. Had Respondent concurrently received FAP benefits from more than one state, a contention of fraud would have been much more persuasive because Respondent would have received a windfall of FAP benefits for which he was not entitled to receive. Because Respondent did not receive FAP benefits from more than one state, there was no particular financial incentive for Respondent to commit fraud. Without evidence of a financial incentive, a contention of fraud is much less persuasive.

Based on the presented evidence, DHS failed to establish that Respondent intentionally failed to report a change in residency. Accordingly, it is found that DHS failed to establish that Respondent committed an IPV. Even though DHS failed to establish that

Respondent committed an IPV, it must still be determined whether an overissuance of benefits occurred and whether DHS may pursue debt collection actions to recoup those benefits.

When a client group receives more benefits than they are entitled to receive, DHS must attempt to recoup the over-issuance (OI). BAM 700 at 1. An OI is the amount of benefits issued to the client group in excess of what they were eligible to receive. *Id.* Recoupment is a DHS action to identify and recover a benefit OI. *Id.*

DHS may pursue an OI whether it is a client caused error or DHS error. *Id.* at 5. Client and DHS error OIs are not pursued if the estimated OI amount is less than \$125 per program. BAM 700 at 7. The present case concerns an alleged OI of \$1367. Establishing whether DHS or Respondent was at fault for the OI is of no importance because DHS may seek to recoup the amount in either scenario.

For over-issued benefits to clients who are no longer receiving benefits, DHS may request a hearing for debt establishment and collection purposes. The hearing decision determines the existence and collectability of a debt to the agency. BAM 725 at 13. Over-issuance balances on inactive cases must be repaid by lump sum or monthly cash payments unless collection is suspended. *Id.* at 6. Other debt collection methods allowed by DHS regulations include: cash payments by clients, expunged FAP benefits, State of Michigan tax refunds and lottery winnings, federal salaries, federal benefits and federal tax refunds. *Id.* at 7.

DHS established that Respondent received a total of \$1200 in FAP benefits from the State of Michigan over the period of 10/2010-3/2011 (see Exhibit 24). DHS also established that Respondent spent the FAP benefits exclusively within the State of [REDACTED] beginning 8/29/10. This is persuasive evidence that Respondent was not living in the State of Michigan beginning 8/29/10 and that Respondent should not have received State of Michigan issued FAP benefits beginning 10/2010. It is found that Respondent was not a Michigan resident for the period of 10/2010-3/2011 and the \$1200 in FAP benefits issued to Respondent for the period of 10/2010-3/2011 were over-issued. Accordingly, DHS established a basis of debt collection for \$1200 against Respondent.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, finds that DHS established a basis for debt collection for \$1200 in FAP benefits over-issued to Respondent for the period of 10/2010-3/2011. The actions taken by DHS are PARTIALLY AFFIRMED.

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, finds that DHS failed establish that Claimant committed an Intentional Program Violation stemming from an over-issuance of FAP benefits from 10/2010-3/2011. The actions taken by DHS are PARTIALLY REVERSED.

Christina Dandoch

Christian Gardocki
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: June 15, 2012

Date Mailed: June 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 Respondent 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.

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

- 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 Respondent:
 - 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
Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P. O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-07322

CG/hw

cc:

