

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 201320410
Issue No: 1038
Case No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: January 30, 2013
Calhoun County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Suzanne D. Sonneborn

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 received by the Department of Human Services (department) on December 28, 2012. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on January 30, 2013. Claimant appeared and provided testimony. The department was represented by [REDACTED], an eligibility specialist with the department's Calhoun County office.

ISSUE

Whether the department properly closed and sanctioned Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits based on Claimant's noncompliance with Work First/Jobs, Education and Training (WF/JET) requirements?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

1. At all times relevant to this hearing, Claimant was a recipient of FIP benefits and, as a recipient of FIP benefits, Claimant was a mandatory WF/JET participant.
2. On June 26, 2012, Claimant signed a document titled "Work and/or Self-Sufficiency Rules for Cash Recipients" and, in doing so, acknowledged with her signature her understanding of the requirements of the JET program including, among other things, letting her DHS specialist know the same day or as soon as she can if she has a good reason that makes it difficult for her to attend the WF/JET program. (Department Exhibit H)

3. On October 1, 2012, the Department mailed Claimant a Work Participation Program Appointment Notice (DHS 4785), advising Claimant of her required attendance at her JET appointment on October 15, 2012 at 9:00 a.m. (Department Exhibit A)
4. Claimant did not attend her October 1, 2012 appointment. (Department Exhibit B)
5. On October 25, 2012, the department mailed Claimant a Notice of Noncompliance (DHS 2444) and a Notice of Case Action for her failure to participate as required in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities. The Notices indicated that, unless good cause was established, her FIP case would be closed effective December 1, 2012 for a three-month sanction as this was Claimant's first non-compliance. The Notice scheduled a triage appointment for October 31, 2012 at 1:15 p.m. (Department Exhibits C, D)
6. Claimant attended the October 31, 2012 triage appointment, at which time Claimant reported that she was unable to attend her JET appointment due to her child's illness. The department provided Claimant with the opportunity to submit medical documentation in support of her child's illness by the close of business on November 1, 2012. (Department Exhibits B, E, F)
7. Claimant did not submit any medical documentation by the close of business on November 1, 2012 in support of her child's illness and the department concluded that Claimant did not establish good cause for her noncompliance because Claimant failed to present any medical documentation excusing her from the WF/JET program.
8. Effective December 1, 2012, Claimant's FIP case was closed and subject to a three-month month sanction for her failure to participate as required in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities. (Department Exhibit D, G)
9. On December 27, 2012, Claimant submitted a hearing request protesting the department's closure of her FIP case.
10. At the January 30, 2013 hearing, Claimant submitted a Medical Needs-JET form completed by a physician's assistant. The form indicates that Claimant's minor son has been diagnosed with "tinea capitis" – but the form fails to indicate the date(s) of the diagnosis, and whether and when Claimant's son was unable to attend school as a result of the diagnosis. (Department Exhibit I)

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Clients have the right to contest a department decision affecting eligibility or benefit levels whenever it is believed that the decision is incorrect. The department will provide an administrative hearing to review the decision and determine the appropriateness of that decision. BAM 600. The regulations governing the hearing and appeal process for applicants and recipients of public assistance in Michigan are found in the Michigan Administrative Code, MAC R 400.901-400.951. An opportunity for a hearing shall be granted to an applicant who requests a hearing because his claim for assistance is denied. MAC R 400.903(1).

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 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 the department when the client applies for cash assistance. Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program requirements, education and training opportunities, and assessments are covered by the JET case manager when a mandatory JET participant is referred at application. BEM 229.

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 Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) 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. BEM 230A.

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. BEM 233A.

JET participants will not be terminated from a JET program without first scheduling a “triage” meeting with the client to jointly discuss noncompliance and good cause. The department coordinates the process to notify the MWA case manager of triage meetings including scheduling guidelines.

Clients can either attend a meeting or participate in a conference call if attendance at the triage meeting is not possible. If a client calls to reschedule an already scheduled triage meeting, the client is offered a telephone conference at that time. Clients must comply with triage requirement within the negative action period.

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. BEM 233A.

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. BEM 233A.

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. BEM 233A.

The penalty for noncompliance without good cause is FIP closure. Effective October 1, 2011, the following minimum penalties apply:

- . For the first occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for not less than three calendar months.
- . For the second occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for not less than six calendar months.
- . For the third and subsequent occurrence on the FIP case, close the FIP for a lifetime sanction. BEM 233A.

Department policy further indicates that the individual penalty counter begins April 1, 2007. BEM 233A. Individual penalties served after October 1, 2011 will be added to the individual's existing penalty count.

Department policy further indicates that a noncompliant group member will be sanctioned from the FAP group for the FIP noncompliance if they are not deferred from FAP work requirements. BEM 233B.

In this case, Claimant was required to participate in the JET/Work First program as a condition of receiving FIP benefits. On October 25, 2012, the department found that Claimant was noncompliant for failing to participate as required in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities – specifically, her failure to attend her October 15, 2012 JET appointment. And, because Claimant did not provide any medical documentation

at her October 31, 2012 triage appointment or by the extended deadline of November 1, 2012, to support her explanation that her son's medical condition kept her from fulfilling her JET/Work First responsibilities, the department closed Claimant's FIP case effective December 1, 2012 for a three-month sanction.

At the January 30, 2013 hearing, Claimant first testified that she did not attend the JET program on October 15, 2012 because of a surgery she was scheduled to have on October 16, 2012. Claimant then testified that she did not attend the JET program on October 15, 2012 because of her son's medical condition. Regardless of the reason or reasons for her failure to attend the JET program, Claimant failed to timely produce any medical documentation in support of her explanations for not attending the JET program. Nor did Claimant call her DHS specialist in advance of her required attendance at the JET program to report her inability to attend – despite Claimant having signed a document titled "Work and/or Self-Sufficiency Rules for Cash Recipients" on June 26, 2012 wherein she acknowledged with her signature her understanding of the requirements of the JET program including, among other things, letting her DHS specialist know the same day or as soon as she can if she has a good reason that makes it difficult for her to attend the WF/JET program

Accordingly, the Administrative Law Judge finds that, based on the material and substantial evidence presented during the hearing, Claimant has failed to show good cause for her failure to participate as required in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities and the department properly closed and imposed a three-month sanction on Claimant's FIP case.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department properly closed and properly imposed a three-month sanction on Claimant's FIP case for her non-compliance with WF/JET requirements. The department's actions are therefore **UPHELD**.

It is **SO ORDERED**.

/s/

Suzanne D. Sonneborn
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura D. Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: February 1, 2013

Date Mailed: February 1, 2013

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.

The Claimant may appeal this 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.

Claimant 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 errors, or other obvious errors in the hearing decision that affect the substantial rights of Claimant;
 - The failure of the ALJ to address other relevant issues in the hearing decision.

A request for a rehearing or reconsideration must be submitted through the local DHS office or directly to MAHS by mail at:

Michigan Administrative Hearings System
Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P.O. Box 30639
Lansing, MI 48909-07322

SDS/cr

cc:

