

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 201334963
Issue No: 1038
Case No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: April 16, 2013
County: Wayne (15)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: C. Adam Purnell

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 on March 7, 2013. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on April 16, 2013. Claimant personally appeared and provided testimony. Participants on behalf of Department of Human Services (Department) included [REDACTED] (PATH Worker) and [REDACTED] (Assistant Manager of the Development Center).

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined Claimant's eligibility for Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits based on noncompliance with the Partnership Accountability Training Hope (PATH) program 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. Claimant was a FIP recipient and a mandatory PATH participant.
2. On February 19, 2013, the Department mailed Claimant a Notice of Noncompliance (DHS-2444) because she failed to participate as required in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities. Claimant's Triage appointment was scheduled for February 26, 2013 at 8:30am.
3. On February 26, 2013, Claimant attended Triage. The Department found Claimant did not show good cause for her noncompliance.

4. The Department mailed Claimant a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) on February 19, 2013, which closed Claimant's FIP benefits for 3 months effective April 1, 2013.
5. Claimant submitted a hearing request on March 7, 2013 protesting the closure of her FIP benefits.
6. This is Claimant's first non-compliance with the PATH program.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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). 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. BAM 600.

The Family Independence Program (FIP), also referred to as "cash assistance," 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).

Effective January 1, 2013, as a condition of FIP eligibility, FIP applicants must attend the Partnership Accountability Training Hope (PATH) program (formerly the JET program) and maintain 21 days' attendance. BEM 229. The program requirements, education and training opportunities, and assessments will be covered by PATH when a mandatory PATH participant is referred at application. BEM 229. In order for their FIP application to be approved, all FIP applicants must complete all of the following: (1) begin the application eligibility period (AEP) by the last date to attend as indicated on the DHS-4785, PATH Appointment Notice; (2) complete PATH AEP requirements; (3) continue to participate in PATH after completion of the 21 day AEP. BEM 229. The Department will deny the FIP application if an applicant does not complete all of the above three components of the AEP. BEM 229.

Federal and state laws require each work eligible individual (WEI) in the FIP and Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) group to participate in the PATH Program or other employment-related activities unless temporarily deferred or engaged in activities that meet participation requirements. BEM 230A. These clients must participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities to increase their employability and

obtain stable employment. BEM 230A. WEIs not referred to the work participation program will participate in other activities to overcome barriers so they may eventually be referred to the work participation program or other employment service provider. BEM 230A. A WEI who refuses, without good cause, to participate in assigned employment and/or other self-sufficiency related activities is subject to penalties. BEM 230A.

The work participation program is administered by the Workforce Development Agency, State of Michigan (WDASOM) through the Michigan one-stop service centers. BEM 230A. The work participation program serves employers and job seekers for employers to have skilled workers and job seekers to obtain jobs that provide economic self-sufficiency. BEM 230A.

Certain clients have particular circumstances which may make their participation in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities problematic. BEM 230A. Unless otherwise deferred, they must be referred to the work participation program. BEM 230A.

Clients are required to engage in self-sufficiency and family strengthening activities even if they are deferred from work participation program or work activities and may be subject to penalties if they do not participate as required. BEM 230A.

Modifications or extra help may include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) reduced hours of required participation; (2) extended education allowances including more than 12 months allowed for vocational education; or (3) extended job search/job readiness time limit. BEM 230A.

When clients with verified disabilities are fully participating to their capability, they are counted as fully engaged in meeting work participation requirements regardless of the hours in which they are engaged, even if they do not meet federal work requirements. BEM 230A.

If the WEI refuses or fails to provide verification of a deferral when required, the Department will refer him or her to the work participation program. BEM 230A. The Department must notify the work participation program service provider immediately by phone or email when a client who was previously referred is granted a temporary deferral. BEM 230A.

A person with a condition or impairment that is pregnancy-related must be deferred for a problem pregnancy. BEM 230A. **Clients requesting a deferral from the work participation program due to pregnancy complications must provide verification that indicates that they are unable to participate. BEM 230A.** These individuals should **not** be referred to the Medical Review Team (MRT) or to an SSI Advocate if the **only** conditions or impairments are due to pregnancy. BEM 230A.

An applicant, recipient or a member add is noncompliant if he or she, without good cause, fails or refuses to do any of the following: (1) appear and participate with the

PATH Program or other employment service provider; (2) complete a Family Automated Screening Tool (FAST), as assigned as the first step in the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) process; (3) develop a FSSP or a Personal Responsibility Plan and Family Contract (PRPFC); (4) comply with activities assigned to on the FSSP; (5) provide legitimate documentation of work participation; (6) appear for a scheduled appointment or meeting related to assigned activities; (7) participate in employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities; (8) accept a job referral; (9) complete a job application; (10) appear for a job interview.¹ BEM 233A.

Noncompliance also can be found if an applicant, recipient or a member add, without good cause, does any of the following: (1) states orally or in writing a definite intent not to comply with program requirements; (2) threatens, physically abuses or otherwise behaves disruptively toward anyone conducting or participating in an employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activity; or (3) refuses 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. BEM 233A. The department coordinates the process to notify the MWA case manager of triage meetings including scheduling guidelines. BEM 233A.

Clients can either attend a meeting or participate in a conference call if attendance at the triage meeting is not possible. BEM 233A. If a client calls to reschedule an already scheduled triage meeting, the client is offered a telephone conference at that time. BEM 233A. Clients must comply with triage requirement within the negative action period. BEM 233A.

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

¹ The Department will not apply the three month, six month or lifetime penalty to ineligible caretakers, clients deferred for lack of child care and disqualified aliens. Failure to complete a FAST or FSSP results in closure due to failure to provide requested verification. Clients can reapply at any time. BEM 233A.

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. BEM 233A. Depending on the case situation, penalties include the following: (1) delay in eligibility at application; (2) ineligibility (denial or termination of FIP with no minimum penalty period); (3) case closure for a minimum of three months for the first episode of noncompliance, six months for the second episode of noncompliance and lifetime closure for the third episode of noncompliance. BEM 233A.

The sanction period begins with the first pay period of a month. BEM 233A. Penalties are automatically calculated by the entry of noncompliance without good cause in the Department's computer system known as Bridges. This applies to active FIP cases, including those with a member add who is a WEI work participation program participant. BEM 233A.

Here, the Department contends that Claimant failed to report to her caseworker (██████████) at Development Centers, Inc and provide Job Search/Job Readiness Reports (JS/JR) by February 12, 2013. Claimant, on the other hand, contends that she provided the Department with a Medical Needs-JET form (DHS-54-E) which excused her participation. Claimant also stated that she did not understand the requirements of the program. She also disagreed that her JS/JR forms were due on February 12, 2013. Claimant testified that the MIS notes dated February 13, 2013 authored by ██████████ were false.

Testimony and other evidence must be weighed and considered according to its reasonableness. *Gardiner v Courtright*, 165 Mich 54, 62; 130 NW 322 (1911); *Dep't of Community Health v Risch*, 274 Mich App 365, 372; 733 NW2d 403 (2007). The weight and credibility of this evidence is generally for the fact-finder to determine. *Dep't of Community Health*, 274 Mich App at 372; *People v Terry*, 224 Mich App 447, 452; 569 NW2d 641 (1997). Moreover, it is for the fact-finder to gauge the demeanor and veracity of the witnesses who appear before him, as best he is able. See, e.g., *Caldwell v Fox*, 394 Mich 401, 407; 231 NW2d 46 (1975); *Zeeland Farm Services, Inc v JBL Enterprises, Inc*, 219 Mich App 190, 195; 555 NW2d 733 (1996).

The record evidence indicates that Claimant was aware that she needed to provide JS/JR sheets to Mr. ██████████ on February 12, 2013. The JS/JR sheets would represent Claimant's Job search activity from the previous week beginning February 4, 2013. This is confirmed by Mr. ██████████'s MIS notes. This Administrative Law Judge also finds that the Department representative's statements are more credible than Claimant's. Claimant's DHS-54-E form which purportedly excuses her participation is from **January of 2012**. Claimant also provided JS/JR sheets from the 2nd and 3rd weeks in February, 2013, but these documents do not cover the time period at issue in this matter which is the week of February 4, 2013. Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge finds that, based on the material and substantial evidence presented during the hearing, Claimant

has failed to show good cause for failing to complete her attendance and job search activities and for failing to report to her required PATH appointment. As a result, the Department properly closed Claimant's FIP case for non-compliance.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the Department properly closed Claimant's FIP case for noncompliance with WF/JET requirements and the 3 (three) month sanction is **AFFIRMED**.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

/s/_____

C. Adam Purnell
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura D. Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: April 22, 2013

Date Mailed: April 23, 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 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.

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 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

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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

CAP/aca

cc:

