

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 201338620
Issue No: 1038
Case No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: May 1, 2013
Genesee 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 March 21, 2013. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on May 1, 2013. Claimant appeared and provided testimony. The department was represented by [REDACTED], a case manager with the Partnership, Accountability, Training, Hope (PATH) program with the department's Genesee County office.

ISSUE

Whether the department properly closed and sanctioned Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits based on Claimant's noncompliance with PATH 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 PATH participant, unless otherwise deferred from the program.
2. On February 20, 2013, the Department mailed Claimant a Work Participation Program Appointment Notice (DHS 4785), advising her of her required attendance at her JET appointment on March 5, 2013 at 9:00 a.m. (Department Exhibit 1)

3. Claimant neither attended nor called in advance to reschedule her March 5, 2013 appointment. (Department Exhibit 4)
4. On March 11, 2013, 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 April 1, 2013 for a three-month sanction as this was Claimant's first non-compliance. The Notice scheduled a triage appointment for March 20, 2013 at 9:00 a.m. and advised Claimant that the triage appointment was an opportunity to report and verify the reason for her noncompliance with the program. (Department Exhibits 2, 3)
5. Claimant neither attended the March 20, 2013 triage appointment nor called in advance thereof to reschedule the appointment and, because Claimant did not provide a good cause reason for her noncompliance, the Department concluded that good cause had not been established. (Department Exhibit 4)
6. Effective April 1, 2013, Claimant's FIP case was closed and subject to a three-month month sanction due to her failure to verify good cause for her inability to participate as required in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities. (Department Exhibit 3)
7. On March 21, 2013, Claimant submitted a hearing request protesting the department's closure of her FIP case.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The regulations governing the hearing and appeal process for applicants and recipients of public assistance in Michigan are found in sections 400.901 to 400.951 of the Michigan Administrative Code (Mich Admin Code). An opportunity for a hearing shall be granted to an applicant who requests a hearing because her claim for assistance has been denied. Mich Admin Code 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 of that decision. Department of Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM) 600 (2011), p. 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. Partnership, Accountability, Training, Hope (PATH) program requirements, education and training opportunities, and assessments are covered by the PATH case manager when a mandatory PATH 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 Partnership, Accountability, Training, Hope (PATH) 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. PATH is a program administered by the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) through the Michigan Works Agencies (MWAs). The PATH 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.

PATH participants will not be terminated from a PATH 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 PATH. 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.

Good cause includes, among other things, the following:

- **The client is physically or mentally unfit for the job or activity, as shown by medical evidence or other reliable information.** This includes any disability-related limitations that preclude participation in a work and/or self-sufficiency-related activity. The disability-related needs or limitations may not have been identified or assessed prior to the noncompliance. BEM 233A. (Emphasis added)

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.

In this case, Claimant was required to participate in the PATH program as a condition of Claimant's receipt of FIP benefits. On March 11, 2013, 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 March 5, 2013 PATH appointment. And, because Claimant did not attend or call to reschedule her March 20, 2013 triage appointment or otherwise provide any explanation for failure to attend her PATH appointment, the department concluded that Claimant failed to provide good cause for her noncompliance and closed Claimant's FIP case effective April 1, 2013 for a three-month sanction.

At the May 1, 2013 hearing, Claimant testified that she did not attend her PATH appointment because she did not receive the PATH Appointment Notice. Claimant testified that she did receive the Notice of Noncompliance and the Notice of Case Action, both of which were mailed to her at the same address to which the PATH Appointment Notice had been mailed. Moreover, the department did not have any information in Claimant's file indicating that the PATH Appointment Notice was returned as undeliverable. The proper mailing and addressing of a letter creates a presumption

of receipt. That presumption may be rebutted by evidence. *Stacey v Sankovich*, 19 Mich App 638 (1969); *Good v Detroit Automobile Inter-Insurance Exchange*, 67 Mich App 270 (1976).

Claimant further testified that she did not attend her March 20, 2013 triage appointment due to transportation issues.

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). Moreover, 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).

This Administrative Law Judge has carefully considered and weighed the testimony and other evidence in the record and finds that Claimant has failed to credibly rebut the presumption that she received the department's PATH Appointment Notice. Moreover, it is undisputed that Claimant was aware of her triage appointment and the opportunity to present good cause and that she could have but failed to request that her March 20, 2013 triage appointment be conducted by telephone if she had transportation issues. Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge finds that, based on the competent, 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 PATH 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: May 2, 2013

Date Mailed: May 3, 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/aca

cc:

