

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 201340096
Issue No.: 1038
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: May 15, 2013
County: Kent

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 following Claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on May 15, 2013 from Lansing, Michigan. Claimant personally appeared and provided testimony. Participants on behalf of Department of Human Services (Department) included [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Supervisor) and [REDACTED] (Lead Case Manager).

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly closed Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits due to Claimant's noncompliance with the Partnership Accountability Training Hope (PATH) program requirements?

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 was a FIP recipient and a mandatory PATH participant.
2. On March 14, 2013, the Department mailed Claimant a Notice of Noncompliance (DHS-2444) because she, for a third time, allegedly failed to participate as required in employment and/or self-sufficiency related activities. The Triage appointment was scheduled for March 20, 2013 at 2:00p.m.
3. On March 20, 2013, Claimant attended Triage and stated that she had problems with her pregnancy which excused her lack of attendance and she disputed that her

job search logs were falsified. The Department found Claimant did not show good cause.

4. The Department mailed Claimant a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) on March 14, 2013 which imposed a **lifetime** penalty and closed Claimant's FIP case effective April 1, 2013.
5. Claimant submitted a hearing request on March 20, 2013 protesting the closure of her FIP benefits.
6. This is Claimant's third non-compliance with the PATH program.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Department policies are contained in the Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM), and the Reference Tables Manual (RFT).

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, 42 USC 601, *et seq.* The Department (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) administers FIP pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and Mich Admin Code, R 400.3101 through R 400.3131. FIP replaced the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program effective October 1, 1996.

Effective January 1, 2013, as a condition of eligibility, FIP applicants must attend the Partnership Accountability Training Hope (PATH) 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.

The goal of the FIP penalty policy is to obtain client compliance with appropriate work and/or self-sufficiency related assignments and to ensure that barriers to such compliance have been identified and removed. BEM 233A. The goal is to bring the client into compliance. BEM 233A.

A Work Eligible Individual (WEI) and non-WEI¹, who fails to participate in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities without good cause, must be penalized. 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.

¹ Except ineligible grantees, clients deferred for lack of child care, and disqualified aliens. See BEM 228.

Generally speaking, 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.

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 JET 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.² 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

² 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.

refusal prevents participation in an employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activity. BEM 233A.

PATH participants will not be terminated from the PATH 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 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 the following: (1) **working full-time at minimum wage** - the person is working at least 40 hours per week on average and earning at least state minimum wage; (2) **physically/mentally unfit** - the client is physically or mentally unfit for the job or activity, as shown by medical evidence or other reliable information³; (3) **illness/injury** - the client has a debilitating illness or injury, or a spouse or child’s illness or injury requires in-home care by the client; (4) **failure to accommodate** - the DHS, employment services provider, contractor, agency, or employer failed to make reasonable accommodations for the client’s disability or the client’s needs related to the disability; (5) **child care not provided** - the client requested child care services from DHS, the work participation program, or other employment services provider prior to

³ 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.

case closure for noncompliance and child care is needed for an eligible child, but none is appropriate, suitable, affordable and within reasonable distance of the client's home or work site; (6) **special child care** - the care is appropriate to the child's age, disabilities and other conditions; (7) **commuting time** - the total commuting time to and from work and the child care facility does not exceed 3 (three) hours per day; (8) **appropriate child care** - the provider meets applicable state and local standards⁴; (9) the child care is provided at the rate of payment or reimbursement offered by DHS; (10) **transportation not provided** - the client requested transportation services from DHS, the work participation program, or other employment services provider prior to case closure and reasonably priced transportation is not available to the client; (11) **illegal** - the employment involves illegal activities; (12) **discrimination** - the client experiences discrimination on the basis of age, race, disability, gender, color, national origin or religious beliefs; (13) **unplanned event** - credible information indicates an unplanned event or factor which likely prevents or significantly interferes with employment and/or self-sufficiency-related activities⁵; (14) **new employment** - the client quits to assume employment comparable in salary and hours (the new hiring must occur before the quit); (15) **total commuting time** - total commuting time exceeds 2 (two) hours per day, NOT including time to and from child care facilities or three hours per day, including time to and from child care facilities. 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 submits that Claimant had unexcused absences on the following dates in February 2013: 14, 20, 26 and 27. The Department also contends that Claimant submitted false and/or misleading job search logs. Specifically, the Department argues that Claimant's job search logs falsely indicate that she applied for jobs at: [REDACTED] (March 11, 2013), [REDACTED] (March 11, 2013), [REDACTED] (March 13, 2013), [REDACTED] (March 13, 2013) and [REDACTED] (March 13, 2013). The Department indicates that the above listed businesses had no record of Claimant's applications. Claimant, on the other hand, contends that she has

⁴ Also, unlicensed providers who are NOT registered/licensed by the DHS Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing must meet DHS enrollment requirements; see BEM 704.

⁵ Unplanned events or factors include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) domestic violence; (2) health or safety risk; (3) religion; (4) homelessness; (5) jail and (6) hospitalization. BEM 233A.

good cause for her absences due to pregnancy complications. She testified that she called in for each absence. Claimant did not have any documentation to support her medical claims. Claimant also insists that she did apply for employment with the above-mentioned businesses. She suggested that the businesses may have lost her applications as she normally does not hand them to managers but gives them to lower-level employees.

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).

This Administrative Law Judge has carefully considered and weighed the testimony and other evidence in the record. Claimant did not provide any documentation to support her claims of pregnancy complications which affected her ability to attend the mandatory PATH appointments. This Administrative Law Judge finds that Claimant's testimony was simply not credible. Claimant's explanation for why all 5 businesses did not have her applications is not credible and is unreasonable. Based on the competent, material, and substantial evidence presented during the hearing, this Administrative Law Judge finds that Claimant has failed to show good cause for failing to complete her attendance requirements and for falsifying her job search activity reports. 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 PATH requirements and the **lifetime** 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: May 20, 2013

Date Mailed: May 21, 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

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:

