

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No: 201320230
Issue No: 1038, 3008
Case No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: January 31, 2013
County: Mecosta

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 December 17, 2012. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on January 31, 2013. Claimant personally appeared and provided testimony. Participants on behalf of Department of Human Services (Department) included [REDACTED] (Family Independence Specialist), [REDACTED] (PATH Coordinator) and [REDACTED] (Placement Consultant with Michigan Works!/PATH Program).

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly terminated and sanctioned Claimant's Family Independence Program (FIP) and Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits for 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. Claimant was a FIP recipient, a FAP recipient and a mandatory WF/JET participant.
2. On November 18, 2012, Claimant failed to timely and properly submit her weekly Job Search/Job Readiness (JS/JR) activity logs.
3. On November 25, 2012, Claimant failed to timely and properly submit her weekly Job Search/Job Readiness (JS/JR) activity logs.
4. On December 6, 2012, 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 December 13, 2012 at 9:00 a.m.

5. On December 13, 2012, Claimant did not attend Triage. The Department found Claimant did not show good cause for her noncompliance.
6. The Department mailed Claimant a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) effective January 1, 2013, which closed Claimant's FIP benefits for a lifetime and reduced Claimant's FAP benefits to \$ [REDACTED] for three (3) months.
7. Claimant submitted a hearing request on December 17, 2012 protesting the closure of her FIP benefits.
8. This is Claimant's third non-compliance with the WF/JET 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).

The Department requires clients to participate in employment and self-sufficiency related activities and to accept employment when offered. BEM 233A. The focus is to assist clients in removing barriers so they can participate in activities which lead to self-sufficiency. BEM 233A. However, there are consequences for a client who refuses to participate, without good cause. BEM 233A.

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-WEIs¹, who fails, without good cause, to participate in employment or self-sufficiency-related activities, 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.

Effective January 1, 2013, as a condition of FIP eligibility, FIP applicants must attend the PATH program (formerly JET program) and maintain 21 days' attendance. BEM 229. The Partnership. Accountability Training. Hope. (PATH) program requirements, education and training opportunities, and assessments will be covered by PATH when a mandatory PATH participant is referred at application. BEM 229. Specifically, PATH participants must complete all of the following in order for their FIP application to be approved: (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.

When assigned, clients must engage in and comply with all PATH assignments while the FIP application is pending. PATH engagement is a condition of FIP eligibility. Failure by a client to participate fully in assigned activities while the FIP application is pending will result in denial of FIP benefits. Bridges automatically denies FIP benefits for noncompliance while the application is pending. Bridges will not penalize Food Assistance when a client fails to attend PATH as a condition of eligibility when the noncompliant individual is not active FIP on the date of the noncompliance. Clients must be active FIP and FAP on the date of FIP noncompliance to apply a FIP penalty to the FAP case. 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 JET 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.

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

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.

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 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.

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.

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. 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.

The Food Assistance Program (FAP) [formerly known as the Food Stamp (FS) 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). The Department (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) administers FAP pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and 1997 AACRS R 400.3001-3015.

Applicants or recipients of Food Assistance Program (FAP) only must accept and maintain employment. BEM 233B. BEM 233B apply to all FAP applicants and recipients age 16 and over. Noncompliance without good cause, with employment requirements for FIP/RCA³ may affect FAP if both programs were active on the date of the FIP noncompliance. See BEM 233A and BEM 233B.

Michigan's FAP Employment and Training program is voluntary and penalties for noncompliance may only apply in the following two situations: (1) client is active FIP/RCA and FAP and becomes noncompliant with a cash program requirement without good cause; and (2) client is pending or active FAP only and refuses employment (voluntarily quits a job or voluntarily reduces hours of employment) without good cause. BEM 233B. At no other time is a client considered noncompliant with employment or self-sufficiency related requirements for FAP. BEM 233B.

³ Refugee Cash Assistance program.

The Department will disqualify a FAP group member for noncompliance when all the following exist: (1) the client was active both FIP/RCA and FAP on the date of the FIP/RCA noncompliance; (2) the client did not comply with FIP/RCA employment requirements; (3) the client is subject to a penalty on the FIP/RCA program; (4) the client is not deferred from FAP work requirements; see DEFERRALS in BEM 230B; and (5) the client did not have good cause for the noncompliance. BEM 233B.

Here, Claimant admitted that she failed to provide required JS/JR logs on the dates indicated. However, Claimant contends that she had good cause because she was working at the time. This is not good cause. The Department appropriately closed Claimant's FIP and properly reduced her FAP accordingly.

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 properly and timely complete her mandatory JS/JR sheets. As a result, the Department properly closed Claimant's FIP case for non-compliance and properly reduced her FAP.

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 lifetime sanction is **AFFIRMED**. The Department also properly reduced Claimant's FAP.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

/s/_____

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

Date Signed: February 5, 2013

Date Mailed: February 5, 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/cr

cc:

