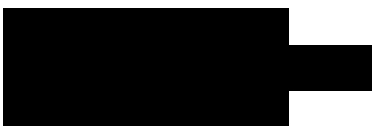


STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING SYSTEM
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:



Reg. No.: 201334273
Issue No.: 3003
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: April 16, 2013
County: Wayne County DHS #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 following Claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on April 16, 2013 from Lansing, Michigan. Participants on behalf of Claimant included [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Claimant) and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Claimant's cousin). Participants on behalf of Department of Human Services (Department) included [REDACTED] [REDACTED]'s (Eligibility Specialist) and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Assistance Payments Supervisor).

ISSUE

Did the department properly calculate Claimant's Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits?

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 received FAP benefits with a monthly allotment of \$ [REDACTED] and a group size of 1.
2. On March 5, 2013, the Department mailed Claimant a Notice of Case Action (DHS-1605) which, effective April 1, 2013, approved Claimant's FAP case for a \$ [REDACTED] monthly allotment following a redetermination.
3. On March 11, 2013, Claimant filed a hearing request, challenging the Department's calculation of her monthly FAP benefits following redetermination.

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 client has the right to request a hearing for any action, failure to act or undue delay by the department. BAM 105. The department provides an administrative hearing to review the decision and determine its appropriateness. BAM 600.

The regulations that govern the hearing and appeal process for applicants and recipients of public assistance in Michigan are contained in the Michigan Administrative Code (Mich Admin Code) Rules 400.901 through 400.951. An opportunity for a hearing shall be granted to a recipient who is aggrieved by an agency action resulting in suspension, reduction, discontinuance, or termination of assistance. Mich Admin Code 400.903(1).

The application forms and each written notice of case action inform clients of their right to a hearing. BAM 600. These include an explanation of how and where to file a hearing request, and the right to be assisted by and represented by anyone the client chooses. BAM 600. The client must receive a written notice of all case actions affecting eligibility or amount of benefits. When a case action is completed it must specify: (1) the action being taken by the department; (2) the reason(s) for the action; (3) the specific manual item(s) that cites the legal base for an action, or the regulation, or law itself. BAM 220.

The Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS) may grant a hearing about any of the following: (1) denial of an application and/or supplemental payments; (2) reduction in the amount of program benefits or service; (3) suspension or termination of program benefits or service; (4) restrictions under which benefits or services are provided; (5) delay of any action beyond standards of promptness and (6) for FAP only, the current level of benefits or denial of expedited service. BAM 600.

Department policy discusses the importance of conducting a prehearing conference. See BAM 600 pages 12 and 13. The policy provides that the Department must assure that clients receive the services and assistance to which they are entitled. BAM 600. Concerns expressed in the hearing request should be resolved whenever possible through a conference with the client or authorized hearing representative rather than through a hearing. BAM 600.

When the Department conducts a prehearing conference, the Department must do **all** of the following: (1) determine why the client or authorized hearing representative is disputing the DHS action; (2) review any documentation the client or authorized hearing representative has to support his allegation; (3) explain the department's position and identify and discuss the differences; (4) determine whether the dispute can be resolved locally or requires MAHS to resolve; (5) mention to clients the availability of reimbursement for child care or transportation costs incurred in order to attend the hearing. BAM 600 p 13.

For each hearing not resolved at a prehearing conference, the Department is required to complete a Hearing Summary (DHS-3050). BAM 600. In the hearing summary, all case identifiers and notations on case status must be complete; see RFF 3050. BAM 600. The DHS-3050 narrative must include all of the following: (1) clear statement of the case action, including all programs involved in the case action; (2) facts which led to the action; (3) policy which supported the action; (4) correct address of the AHR or, if none, the client; and (4) **description of the documents the local office intends to offer as exhibits at the hearing.** BAM 600. Clients and AHRs have the right to review the case record and **obtain copies of needed documents and materials relevant to the hearing.** BAM 600.

Department workers who attend the hearings, are instructed to **always** include the following in planning the case presentation: (1) an explanation of the action(s) taken; (2) a summary of the policy or laws used to determine that the action taken was correct; (3) any clarifications by central office staff of the policy or laws used; (4) the facts which led to the conclusion that the policy is relevant to the disputed case action; (5) the DHS procedures ensuring that the client received adequate or timely notice of the proposed action and affording all other rights. BEM 600.

During the hearing, the ALJ will follow the same rules used in circuit court ***to the extent these rules are practical in the case being heard.*** BAM 600. The ALJ must ensure that the record is complete, and may do the following: (1) take an active role in questioning witnesses and parties; (2) assist either side to be sure all the necessary information is presented on the record; (3) be more lenient than a circuit court judge in deciding what evidence may be presented; and (4) refuse to accept evidence that the ALJ believes is unduly repetitious, immaterial, irrelevant or incompetent.. BAM 600.

The ALJ determines the facts based only on evidence introduced at the hearing, draws a conclusion of law, and determines whether DHS policy was appropriately applied. BAM 600.

Claimant's request for a hearing in the instant matter clearly concerns the Food Assistance Program (FAP), (formerly known as the Food Stamp (FS) program) which 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 of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the FAP program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3001-3015. Department policies are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Program Reference Manual (BRM).

Claimant, in the instant matter, believes that the Department reduced her FAP from \$ [REDACTED] per month to \$ [REDACTED] per month. The record reveals that Claimant, following redetermination, was approved for FAP but for a substantially lower monthly amount than during the previous eligibility period. Thus, the Department has the burden of proof to show how and why Claimant's FAP was \$ [REDACTED] per month. The Department has failed to meet its burden of proof in this regard.

The record provided to this Administrative Law Judge consisted of the following: a blank redetermination packet and the notice of case action. The Department did not include any documentation to show how it calculated Claimant's \$ [REDACTED] monthly FAP following redetermination. The hearing summary indicated that Claimant returned the form without proof of her shelter expense, so the expense was not added to the budget. However, the Department failed to include the completed redetermination packet in the record. Without any objective documentation regarding Claimant's income, expenses, etc, the Administrative Law Judge cannot determine whether the Department properly calculated her FAP amount. During the hearing, the Department representatives were unable to clearly show how and why Claimant's monthly FAP was \$ [REDACTED] following redetermination.

Based on the lack of documentation and the inability of the Department representatives to sufficiently explain the Department's action, this Administrative Law Judge is unable to make a reasoned, informed decision.

Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the Department has failed to carry its burden of proof and did not provide information necessary to enable this ALJ to determine whether the Department followed policy as required under BAM 600.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, is unable to decide whether the Department acted in accordance with policy in determining Claimant's FAP eligibility.

Therefore, the Department determination is **REVERSED**.

THE DEPARTMENT IS ORDERED TO DO THE FOLLOWING WITHIN 10 DAYS OF THE DATE OF MAILING OF THIS DECISION AND ORDER:

- Initiate a redetermination of Claimant's eligibility for FAP back to April 1, 2013.
- The Department shall also issue any supplemental and/or retroactive benefits provided that Claimant is entitled to receive same under applicable policies.

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 22, 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:

