

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 20144530
Issue No.: 3005
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: February 24, 2014
County: Oakland (02)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Robert J. Chavez

HEARING DECISION FOR INTENTIONAL PROGRAM VIOLATION

Upon the request for a hearing by the Department of Human Services (Department), this matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9, and in accordance with Titles 7, 42 and 45 of the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), particularly 7 CFR 273.16, and with Mich Admin Code, R 400.3130 and R 400.3178. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on February 24, 2014 from Detroit, Michigan. The Department was represented by [REDACTED], Regulation Agent of the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

Participants on behalf of Respondent included: [REDACTED].

Respondent did not appear at the hearing and it was held in Respondent's absence pursuant to 7 CFR 273.16(e), Mich Admin Code R 400.3130(5), or Mich Admin Code R 400.3178(5).

ISSUES

1. Did Respondent receive an overissuance (OI) of
 Family Independence Program (FIP) State Disability Assistance (SDA)
 Food Assistance Program (FAP) Child Development and Care (CDC)
 Medical Assistance (MA)
benefits that the Department is entitled to recoup?
2. Did Respondent, by clear and convincing evidence, commit an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)?
3. Should Respondent be disqualified from receiving
 Family Independence Program (FIP)? State Disability Assistance (SDA)?
 Food Assistance Program (FAP)? Child Development and Care (CDC)?

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the competent, material, and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

1. The Department's OIG filed a hearing request on [REDACTED], to establish an OI of benefits received by Respondent as a result of Respondent having allegedly committed an IPV.
2. The OIG has has not requested that Respondent be disqualified from receiving program benefits.
3. Respondent was a recipient of FIP FAP SDA CDC MA benefits issued by the Department.
4. The Department's OIG indicates that the time period it is considering the fraud period is [REDACTED].
5. During the alleged fraud period, Respondent was issued \$3,682 in FIP FAP SDA CDC MA benefits by the State of Michigan, and the Department alleges that Respondent was entitled to \$0 in such benefits during this time period.
6. The Department alleges that Respondent received an OI in FIP FAP SDA CDC MA benefits in the amount of \$3,682.
7. This was Respondent's first second third alleged IPV.
8. A notice of hearing was mailed to Respondent at the last known address and was was not returned by the US Post Office as undeliverable.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Department policies are contained in the Department of Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), Department of Human Services Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM), and Department of Human Services Reference Tables Manual (RFT). Prior to Bridges implementation, Department policies were contained in the Department of Human Services Program Administrative Manuals (PAM), Department of Human Services Program Eligibility Manual (PEM), and Department of Human Services Reference Schedules Manual (RFS).

The Family Independence Program (FIP) 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 1999 AC, Rule 400.3101

through Rule 400.3131. FIP replaced the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program effective October 1, 1996.

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 1999 AC, Rule 400.3001 through Rule 400.3015.

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program, which provides financial assistance for disabled persons, is established by 2004 PA 344. The Department of Human Services (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and 2000 AACS, Rule 400.3151 through Rule 400.3180.

The Child Development and Care (CDC) program is established by Titles IVA, IVE and XX of the Social Security Act, the Child Care and Development Block Grant of 1990, and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The program is implemented by Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 98 and 99. The Department provides services to adults and children pursuant to MCL 400.14(1) and 1999 AC, Rule 400.5001 through Rule 400.5015.

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by the Title XIX of the Social Security Act and is implemented by Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Department of Human Services (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) administers the MA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MCL 400.105.

When a client group receives more benefits than they are entitled to receive, DHS must attempt to recoup the OI. BAM 700, p. 1.

Suspected IPV means an OI exists for which all three of the following conditions exist:

- The client intentionally failed to report information or intentionally gave incomplete or inaccurate information needed to make a correct benefit determination, and
- The client was clearly and correctly instructed regarding his or her reporting responsibilities, and
- The client has no apparent physical or mental impairment that limits his or her understanding or ability to fulfill their reporting responsibilities.

BAM 700 (2013), p. 6; BAM 720, p. 1.

An IPV is also suspected for a client who is alleged to have trafficked FAP benefits. BAM 720, p. 1.

An IPV requires that the Department establish by clear and convincing evidence that the client has intentionally withheld or misrepresented information for the **purpose** of establishing, maintaining, increasing or preventing reduction of program benefits or eligibility. BAM 720, p. 1 (emphasis in original); see also 7 CFR 273(e)(6). Clear and convincing evidence is evidence sufficient to result in a clear and firm belief that the proposition is true. See M Civ JI 8.01.

The federal Food Stamp regulations read in part:

(c) Definition of Intentional Program Violation. Intentional Program Violation shall consist of having intentionally:

- (1) made a false or misleading statement, or misrepresented, concealed or withheld facts; or
- (2) committed any act that constitutes a violation of the Food Stamp Act, the Food Stamp Program Regulations, or any State statute for the purpose of using, presenting, transferring, acquiring, receiving, possessing or trafficking of coupons, authorization cards or reusable documents used as part of an automated benefit delivery system (access device). 7 CFR 273.16(c).

(6) Criteria for determining intentional program violation. The hearing authority shall base the determination of intentional program violation on clear and convincing evidence which demonstrates that the household member(s) committed, and intended to commit, intentional program violation as defined in paragraph (c) of this section. 7 CFR 273.16(c)(6).

The Department's OIG requests IPV hearings for cases when:

- benefit overissuance are not forwarded to the prosecutor.
- prosecution of welfare fraud is declined by the prosecutor for a reason other than lack of evidence, and
- the total overissuance amount is \$1000 or more, or
- the total overissuance amount is less than \$1000, and

- the group has a previous intentional program violation, or
- the alleged IPV involves FAP trafficking, or
- the alleged fraud involves concurrent receipt of assistance,
- the alleged fraud is committed by a state/government employee.

BAM 720 (2013), p. 12.

A court or hearing decision that finds a client committed IPV disqualifies that client from receiving program benefits. A disqualified recipient remains a member of an active group as long as he lives with them. Other eligible group members may continue to receive benefits. BAM 720, p. 12.

Clients who commit an IPV are disqualified for a standard disqualification period except when a court orders a different period, or except when the overissuance relates to MA. BAM 720, p. 13. Refusal to repay will not cause denial of current or future MA if the client is otherwise eligible. BAM 710 (2013), p. 2. Clients are disqualified for periods of one year for the first IPV, two years for the second IPV, lifetime disqualification for the third IPV, and ten years for a concurrent receipt of benefits. BAM 720, p. 16.

Therefore, the undersigned may only find an IPV if there is clear and convincing evidence that the respondent intentionally made a false or misleading statement, or intentionally withheld information with the intention to commit an IPV, with regard to the FAP program. Thus, the Department must not only prove that the respondent committed an act, but that there was intent to commit the act.

In this case, the Department has established that respondent was aware of the responsibility to report all changes to the Department. Respondent has no apparent physical or mental impairment that limits the understanding or ability to fulfill the reporting responsibilities. However, the undersigned is not convinced that the Department has met its burden of proof in providing clear and convincing evidence that the respondent intended to defraud the Department with regard to her FAP eligibility.

The burden of proof that the Department must meet in order to prove Intentional Program Violation is very high. It is not enough to prove that the respondent was aware of the requirements to report at some point, nor is it enough to prove that the respondent did not report in a timely manner. The Department must prove in a clear and convincing manner, that, not only did the respondent withhold critical information, but that the respondent withheld this information with the intent to commit an IPV.

In other words, the Department must prove that the respondent did not simply forget to meet her obligations to report, but rather, actively sought to defraud the Department.

The Department has not proven that in the current case. Respondent applied for, and received, FAP benefits on [REDACTED] through a redetermination. The

respondent's statement of benefits shows that the benefits were used out of state beginning in [REDACTED]. There is no indication that respondent applied for benefits while intending to live out of state, or while living out of state. While there was admittedly a redetermination made in [REDACTED], during which time respondent was using benefits out of state, the agency has not established that respondent was actually living out of state, besides the presentation of a records showing where respondent's benefits were used, which is addressed below.

While the undersigned admits that, given the amount of time respondent's benefits were used out of state, respondent possibly knew at some point that they should report and apply for residency in another state, it is important to remember that "possible" is an evidentiary threshold far below "clear and convincing". Clear and convincing evidence requires something more, some piece of evidence that clearly elevates respondent's actions from a mere failure to report a location change into something clearly malicious.

This does not require evidence that proves maliciousness and intent beyond a reasonable doubt, but something more is required nonetheless. In the current case, all the Department has proven is that respondent did not report. There is no evidence that clearly supports a finding that there was intent to commit an IPV, versus a respondent who, for instance, simply forgot her obligation. As such, the Administrative Law Judge declines to find an IPV in the current case.

This is of course, assuming that respondent had a requirement to report a change or was overissued benefits as a result of a loss of residency status. In the current case, the Department has only provided one exhibit—a statement of where respondent's benefits were used—to show respondent's intent to move out of state.

While it is true that respondent used their benefits in another state for several months, there is no evidence that respondent actually lived in the state in question, such as a driver's license, leases, property tax payments, applications for benefits from the other state's agencies, or evidence of respondent's intent to stay in the state in question.

Furthermore, respondent testified credibly that, during the time period in question, respondent was still filing job applications in Michigan, did not change her address, did not move personal belongings, and had not decided to permanently leave Michigan. Per respondent testimony, respondent did not officially decide to leave Michigan until [REDACTED], at which point she began applying for residency in [REDACTED]. The Department failed to rebut any of this testimony or offer any proof that respondent had taken up residency in the state of [REDACTED]. As such, given that the burden of proof is on the Department to show that respondent had indeed changed residency, the undersigned cannot hold that there was a residency change without some evidence showing so, beyond a statement of where benefits were used.

Contrary to popular belief, BEM 220, Residency, does not set any particular standard as to when a person is legally residing in another state, nor does it state that the simple act of using food benefits in another state counts as residing in that other state. BEM 220

does not give a maximum time limit that a respondent may leave the state and lose residency in the State of Michigan. The simple act of leaving the state—even for an extended length of time—does not in anyway remove a benefit’s residency status for the purposes of the FAP program.

It should be noted that the Department also cited BEM 212 as policy allowing a DHS client to reside out of state for only 30 days. The Administrative Law Judge has considered this argument and ultimately finds the argument to be unconvincing. The argument supposes that it is possible to leave one’s own group; the undersigned finds no support in policy for this supposition. Furthermore, the policy in question, BEM 212 considers a “person temporarily absent from the group”, which implies that the group in question still exists. The Department is arguing that by being absent from the state for more than 30 days, the group is destroyed and ceases to be in existence, something not contemplated by policy.

Finally, the undersigned notes that the residency policy, BEM 220, specifically uses the term “temporary absence” for both the FIP and SDA programs with regards to residency limits. This is defined in BEM 210, specifically as, among other things, that “the absence has lasted or is expected to last 30 days or less”. The term temporary absence, which is defined for FAP benefits in BEM 212, is not used in BEM 220 with regard to FAP residency.

The undersigned finds this persuasive. If the policy writers and law makers had intended there to be a 30 day out of state limit with regard to the FAP policy, they could have easily used the term “temporary absence” in BEM 220 regarding FAP residency, as they did with the SDA and FIP programs. They did not. The only way one can come to a requirement of a 30 day out of state limit for FAP benefits is to stretch the meaning of BEM 212 to allow the concept of a person being able to leave their group of one, which was discussed above.

Therefore, for those reasons, the undersigned finds the Department’s argument unconvincing.

Because there is no supporting evidence to show that respondent was actually living in another state, the undersigned cannot hold that they were, and as such, must decide that they lawfully received FAP benefits and there is no overissuance in the current case.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, and for the reasons stated on the record, concludes that:

1. Respondent did did not commit an IPV by clear and convincing evidence.

2. Respondent did did not receive an OI of program benefits in the amount of \$3,682 from the following program(s) FIP FAP SDA CDC MA.

The Department is ORDERED to

- delete the OI and cease any recoupment action.
- initiate recoupment procedures for the amount of \$ _____ in accordance with Department policy.
- reduce the OI to \$ _____ for the period _____, and initiate recoupment procedures in accordance with Department policy.

- It is FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent be disqualified from
- FIP FAP SDA CDC for a period of
 - 12 months. 24 months. lifetime.



Robert J. Chavez
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: 3/19/2014

Date Mailed: 3/19/2014

NOTICE: The law provides that within 30 days of receipt of the above Decision and Order, the Respondent may appeal it to the circuit court for the county in which he/she lives.

RJC/hw

cc:

