

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

IN THE MATTER OF:



Reg. No.: 2014-27838
Issue No(s): 3005
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: April 8, 2014
County: Wayne County DHS #15

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Colleen Lack

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 April 8, 2014 from Lansing, Michigan. The Department was represented by [REDACTED], Regulation Agent of the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

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, by clear and convincing evidence, commit an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)?
2. Did Respondent receive an overissuance (OI) of Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits that the Department is entitled to recoup?
3. Should Respondent be disqualified from receiving Food Assistance Program (FAP)?

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 February 20, 2014, to establish an OI of benefits received by Respondent as a result of Respondent having allegedly committed an IPV.

2. The OIG has requested that Respondent be disqualified from receiving program benefits.
3. Respondent was a recipient of FAP benefits issued by the Department.
4. It was not established that Respondent was aware of his responsibilities and that fraudulent participation in FAP could result in criminal or civil or administrative claims.
5. It was not established whether Respondent had apparent physical or mental impairment(s) that would limit his understanding or ability to fulfill this requirement.
6. The Department's OIG indicates that the time period it is considering the fraud period is June 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013 (fraud period).
7. During the fraud period, Respondent is alleged to have trafficked \$ [REDACTED] in FAP benefits.
8. This was Respondent's first alleged IPV.
9. A notice of hearing was mailed to Respondent at the last known address and 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 August 1, 2008, 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 Food Assistance Program (FAP) [formerly known as the Food Stamp program] is established by the Food Stamp Act of 1977, as amended, 7 USC 2011 to 2036a and is implemented by the federal regulations contained in 7 CFR 271.1 to 285.5. The Department (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) administers FAP pursuant to MCL 400.10 and Mich Admin Code, R 400.3001 to .3015.

The Department's OIG requests IPV hearings for the following cases:

- FAP trafficking OIs that are not forwarded to the prosecutor,
- prosecution of welfare fraud or FAP trafficking is declined by the prosecutor for a reason other than lack of evidence, and

- the total OI amount for the FIP, SDA, CDC, MA and FAP programs is \$1000 or more, or
- the total OI amount is less than \$1000, **and**
 - the group has a previous IPV, or
 - the alleged IPV involves FAP trafficking, or
 - the alleged fraud involves concurrent receipt of assistance (see BEM 222), or
 - the alleged fraud is committed by a state/government employee.

BAM 720 (7-1-2013), p. 12.

Intentional Program Violation

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 reporting responsibilities.

BAM 700 (7-1-2013), p. 7; 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 273.16(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.

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

An IPV exists when an administrative hearing decision, a repayment and disqualification agreement or court decision determines FAP benefits were trafficked. BAM 700 p. 8, BAM 720, p. 2.

“Trafficking” is the buying or selling of FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food; selling products purchased with FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food; or purchasing containers with deposits, dumping/discarding product and then returning containers to obtain cash refund deposits. BAM 700, p. 2.

Documentation used to establish the trafficking determination, such as an affidavit from a store owner or sworn testimony from a federal or state investigator of how much a client could have reasonably trafficked in that store. This can be established through circumstantial evidence. BAM 720, p. 8.

The above cited BAM 700 and 720 policy excerpts indicate intent is not needed for a suspected IPV based on FAP trafficking. However, pursuant to 7 CFR 273.16(e)(6) the criteria for determining an IPV still includes clear and convincing evidence that the client has committed, **and intended to commit**, an IPV. (emphasis added) Further, 7 CFR 273.16(c)(2) sets out the definition of an IPV, which includes **intentionally** committing 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) is an IPV. (emphasis added)

The Department asserted Respondent did knowingly use, transfer, acquire, alter, purchase, possess, present for redemption or transport food stamps of coupons or other access devices other than authorized by the food stamp act of 1977. (Exhibit A, page 1) However, the Department did not provide sufficient evidence of intent, such as a signed assistance application for FAP documenting that Respondent was aware of his responsibilities and that fraudulent participation in FAP could result in criminal or civil or administrative claims. The Regulation Agent's testimony indicates there was only an assumption that Respondent had signed an assistance application for FAP based on his receipt of FAP benefits. The Regulation Agent acknowledged that the Respondent's actual case file had not been checked to confirm there was a signed assistance application. In this case, the Department has not presented sufficient evidence that the Respondent **intentionally** trafficked in FAP benefits during the fraud period. Accordingly, the Department has not established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent committed an IPV based on FAP trafficking.

Disqualification

A court or hearing decision that finds a client committed IPV disqualifies that client from receiving program benefits. BAM 720, p. 15. A disqualified recipient remains a member of an active group as long as he lives with them, and other eligible group members may continue to receive benefits. BAM 720, p. 15.

Clients who commit an IPV are disqualified for a standard disqualification period except when a court orders a different period, or except when the OI relates to MA. BAM 720, p. 15. Refusal to repay will not cause denial of current or future MA if the client is otherwise eligible. BAM 710 (7-1-13), 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 FAP concurrent receipt of benefits. BAM 720, p. 16.

In this case, the evidence of record was not sufficient to establish that Respondent committed the FAP trafficking IPV, therefore, no disqualification can be applied.

Overissuance

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

The OI amount for FAP trafficking-related IPV is the value of the trafficked benefits as determined by:

- The court decision.
- The individual's admission.
- Documentation used to establish the trafficking determination, such as an affidavit from a store owner or sworn testimony from a federal or state investigator of how much a client could have reasonably trafficked in that store. This can be established through circumstantial evidence.

BAM 720 p. 8

In this case, the alleged OI was based on the suspected FAP trafficking IPV. Because the evidence of record was not sufficient to establish that Respondent committed a FAP trafficking IPV, there can be no determination of the value of the trafficked benefits.


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, if any, concludes that:

1. The Department has not established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent intentionally committed a FAP trafficking IPV.
2. The Department has not established that Respondent received an OI of FAP program benefits based on the alleged FAP trafficking IPV.
3. Respondent should not be disqualified from receiving FAP.

The Department is ORDERED to delete the OI and cease any recoupment action.

It is FURTHER ORDERED that any disqualification sanction related to this alleged FAP trafficking IPV be removed.



Colleen Lack
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: April 15, 2014
Date Mailed: April 15, 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.

CL/hj

cc:

