

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

IN THE MATTER OF:



Reg. No.: 2014-32119
Issue No.: 3005
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: June 17, 2014
County: Wayne

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: C. Adam Purnell

HEARING DECISION FOR INTENTIONAL PROGRAM VIOLATION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 and in accordance with 7 CFR 273.16 and Mich Admin Code, Rule 400.3130 upon the Department of Human Services' (Department) request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on June 16, 2014, from Lansing, Michigan. The Department was represented by [REDACTED] 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 400.3187(5).

ISSUES

1. Did Respondent receive an overissuance (OI) of Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits that the Department is entitled to recoup?
2. Did Respondent commit an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)?
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 March 24, 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.
4. Respondent had no apparent physical or mental impairment that would limit the understanding or ability to fulfill this requirement.
5. The Department's OIG indicates that the time period they are considering the fraud period is August 1, 2011, through May 30, 2012, (fraud period).
6. During the alleged fraud period, Respondent is alleged to have trafficked [REDACTED] in FAP benefits.
7. This was Respondent's first IPV.
8. 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 Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM), and the Reference Tables Manual (RFT).

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.

An Intentional Program Violation (IPV) is a benefit overissuance (OI) resulting from the willful withholding of information or other violation of law or regulation by the client or his/her authorized representative. See Bridges Program Glossary (BPG) at page 24. When a client group receives more benefits than they are entitled to receive, the Department must attempt to recoup the OI. BAM 700 (2013).

An IPV is suspected for a client who is alleged to have trafficked or is trafficking FAP benefits. BAM 720. "Trafficking" is the buying or selling of FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food. BAM 700. A person is disqualified from FAP when an administrative hearing decision, a repayment and disqualification agreement or court decision determines FAP benefits were trafficked. BAM 203. These FAP trafficking disqualifications are a result of: (1) fraudulently using, transferring, altering, acquiring, or possessing coupons, authorization cards, or access devices; or (2) redeeming or presenting for payment coupons known to be fraudulently obtained or transferred. BEM 203.

The OI amount for trafficking-related IPV is the value of the trafficked benefits as determined by: (1) the court decision; (2) the individual's admission; or (3) 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. BAM 720. This can be established through circumstantial evidence. BAM 720.

Clients who commit an IPV are disqualified for a standard disqualification period except when a court orders a different period. BAM 720. Clients are disqualified for periods of 1 (one) year for the first IPV, 2 (two) years for the second IPV, a lifetime disqualification for the third IPV, and 10 (ten) years for a concurrent receipt of benefits. BAM 720. If the court does not address disqualification in its order, the standard period applies. BAM 720.

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 Michigan Civil Jury Instruction (Mich Civ JI) 8.01.

The Department has the burden of establishing by clear and convincing evidence that the Respondent committed an Intentional Program Violation (IPV). The clear and convincing evidence standard, which is the most demanding standard applied in civil cases, is established where there is evidence so clear, direct and weighty and convincing that a conclusion can be drawn without hesitancy of the truth of the precise facts in issue. *Smith v Anonymous Joint Enterprise*, 487 Mich 102; 793 NW2d 533 (2010), reh den 488 Mich 860; 793 NW2d 559 (2010).

Clear and convincing proof is that which produces in the mind of the trier of fact a firm belief or conviction as to the truth of the precise facts in issue. Evidence may be uncontroverted and yet not be clear and convincing. Conversely, evidence may be clear and convincing even if contradicted. *Id.*

In the present case, the Department's OIG Agent contends that Respondent is responsible for 33 unauthorized transactions at the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] during the alleged fraud period. The Department alleges that Respondent elected to conduct business at the CPS, rather than visit a supermarket which was closer in proximity to Respondent's place of residence. The Department further alleges that the nature of Respondent's Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) transactions demonstrated that she was engaged in FAP trafficking.

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. The following is the Administrative Law Judge's findings based on the clear and convincing evidence on the whole record.

The record shows that [REDACTED] was engaged in "the buying or selling of FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food" as defined by BAM 700. The evidence showed that during the fraud period, the [REDACTED] was a small convenience store with limited eligible food stock items that was not equipped with an optical scanner, bags, boxes, baskets or carts for patrons to carry out eligible food items. The evidence also showed that the [REDACTED] did not have sufficient eligible food items to support high-dollar transactions and sold ineligible hot/cold deli items, meat by the pound and hot prepared food items EBT cards. The record also shows that similarly situated convenience stores in the same geographical area had average EBT card transactions of [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] for over a two-year period.

The Department has established that Respondent fraudulently used, transferred, altered, acquired, or possessed coupons, authorization cards, or access devices. The Department has also shown that Respondent redeemed or presented for payment coupons known to be fraudulently obtained or transferred. The evidence in this record revealed that during the fraud period Respondent conducted 33 transactions at the CPS which were fraudulent in nature. Based on the store size, inventory, and frequency and amount of (EBT) FAP card usage history of transactions issued to Respondent, this Administrative Law Judge finds that Respondent is guilty of FAP trafficking. Respondent's intent can be inferred through circumstantial evidence. Respondent had no apparent physical or mental impairment that limits her understanding or ability to fulfill these reporting responsibilities.

This Administrative Law Judge therefore concludes that the Department has shown, by clear and convincing evidence, that Respondent committed an intentional violation of the FAP program resulting in a total [REDACTED] overissuance. This is Respondent's first FAP IPV. Consequently, the Department's request for FAP program disqualification and full restitution must be granted.

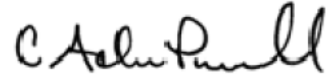
DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, concludes that:

1. Respondent did commit an IPV.
2. Respondent did receive an OI of program benefits in the amount of [REDACTED] from the FAP.

The Department is ORDERED to initiate recoupment procedures for the amount of [REDACTED] in accordance with Department policy.

It is FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent be disqualified from FAP for a period of 12 months.



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

Date Signed: 06/19/2014

Date Mailed: 06/19/2014

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.

CAP/jf

cc:

