

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

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Reg. No.: 14-009377
Issue No.: 3005
Case No.: ██████████
Hearing Date: February 18, 2015
County: WAYNE-DISTRICT 15
(GREYDALE)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Eric Feldman

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 18, 2015, from Detroit, Michigan. The Department was represented by ██████████ 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 receive an overissuance (OI) Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits that the Department is entitled to recoup?
2. Did the Department establish, by clear and convincing evidence, that Respondent committed an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)?
3. Should Respondent be disqualified from receiving benefits for 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 August 25, 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. Respondent was aware of the responsibility that trafficking of benefits is unlawful and a violation of policy and could result in a disqualification from receipt of future benefits and recoupment of issued benefits.
5. Respondent had no apparent physical or mental impairment that would limit the understanding or ability to fulfill this requirement.
6. The Department's OIG indicates that the time period it is considering the fraud period is August 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012 (fraud period).
7. The Department alleges that Respondent trafficked \$850 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.
10. On February 13, 2015, the Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS) received a signed Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing from the Respondent, in which she admitted to the facts as presented and understands that she would be disqualified from the programs listed in the notice. See Exhibit 2, pp. 1-3.

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 273. The Department

(formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) administers FAP pursuant to MCL 400.10; the Social Welfare Act, MCL 400.1-.119b; 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 (May 2014), pp. 12-13.

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 (May 2014), p. 7; 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.

In this case, the Department alleges that Respondent committed an IPV of her FAP benefits because she trafficked \$850 from August 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012. Shortly after commencement of the hearing, it was discovered that Respondent signed a Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing, in which she admitted to the facts as presented and understands that she would be disqualified from the programs listed in the notice. See Exhibit 2, pp. 1-3. The client/authorized representative (AR) is determined to have committed an IPV by signing a DHS-826, Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing, or DHS-830, Disqualification Consent Agreement, or other recoupment and disqualification agreement form. BAM 720 (May and October of 2014), p. 2. Because Respondent signed the Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing, it is established that Respondent committed a FAP IPV. See Exhibit 2, pp. 1-3 and BAM 720, p. 2. Nevertheless, this hearing decision still addresses the evidence presented by the Department pertaining to the FAP trafficking.

BAM 700 defines trafficking as:

- The buying or selling of FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food. Examples would be liquor, exchange of firearms, ammunition, explosives or controlled substances.
- Selling products purchased with FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food.
- Purchasing containers with deposits, dumping/discarding product and then returning containers to obtain cash refund deposits.

BAM 700, p. 2.

Additionally, FAP trafficking disqualifications are a result of the following actions:

- Fraudulently using, transferring, altering, acquiring, or possessing coupons, authorization cards, or access devices; or
- Redeeming or presenting for payment coupons known to be fraudulently obtained or transferred.

BEM 203 (October 2011), p. 2.

The Department's argument against Respondent for trafficking FAP benefits is as follows:

- there exists two food stores (same owner) (hereinafter referred to as "Store 1" and "Store 2"), where the United States Department of Agriculture ("USDA") conducted an investigation at both Store's regarding food trafficking and ultimately led to both Stores' permanent disqualification from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Store 1 and 2 had Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) transactions of FAP benefits which averaged a higher amount in transactions than similar stores in the same size and area;
- over a period of time, Respondent had high dollar and closely related transactions at both Store 1 and 2 which is consistent with traditional trafficking patterns; and
- thus, Respondent trafficked FAP benefits.

First, the Department presented evidence from the USDA that Store 1 and 2 engaged in FAP trafficking, which resulted in the both Store 1 and 2's permanent disqualification from SNAP on May 1, 2013. See Exhibit 1, pp. 34-38.

Second, the Department presented as evidence an e-mail from the USDA detailing a brief synopsis of the trafficking being conducted at Store 1 and 2. See Exhibit 1, p. 42.

Third, the Department's OIG investigative report stated that each Store is operated by the same individual and is located within one block of the other. See Exhibit 1, p. 4. It should be noted that the Department presented a map of how far each Store is from one another. See Exhibit 1, p. 103. The Department's OIG investigative report stated that each Store is a gas station/convenience store that carries a moderate inventory and the Stores have no shopping carts or baskets, one point of sale device, the cash register areas are enclosed with bullet-proof glass making it impractical to purchase large amounts of merchandise and impossible to conduct these transactions in a short period of time. See Exhibit 1, p. 4. In summary, the Department infers that both Stores did not have the food items or the physical means to support high dollar transactions and multiple purchases in a short time period.

It should be noted that the Respondent spoke with the OIG agent on July 29, 2014. See Exhibit 1, p. 5. Respondent indicated she did not shop at the Stores and that she allowed other people to use her Bridge card. See Exhibit 1, p. 5. However, Respondent failed to be present at the hearing to rebut the Department's evidence and testimony.

Also, the Department presented pictures in an attempt to demonstrate the above description of both Stores' layout. A review of the photos does demonstrate that each

Store has purchasable foods and non-purchasable foods. See Exhibit 1, pp. 86-103. The Department, though, did present a photo of the bullet proof barrier, which would make it difficult to purchase high dollar transactions at Store 1 and 2. See Exhibit 1, pp. 86-103.

Fourth, to establish that Respondent trafficked her FAP benefits at each Store, the Department relied on Respondent's FAP transaction history. See Exhibit 1, p. 33. For example, on August 5, 2012, Respondent conducted two large transactions at Store 2 and the total was \$199.98. See Exhibit 1, p. 33. Also, on December 3, 2012, Respondent made one separate transaction at Store 1 in the amount of \$69. See Exhibit 1, p. 33. Then, two minutes later, Respondent made two other transactions at Store 2 and the total was \$131.04. See Exhibit 1, p. 33.

Based on the foregoing information and evidence, the Department has established that Respondent committed an IPV involving her FAP benefits. First, Respondent signed a Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing; therefore, it is established that Respondent committed a FAP IPV. See Exhibit 2, pp. 1-3 and BAM 720, p. 2.

Second, the Department's main argument was based on her FAP transaction history, which presented persuasive evidence that Respondent committed an IPV involving her FAP benefits. As shown above, the Department did present several transactions that were suspicious. All of the purchases were high dollar and closely related transactions. See Exhibit 1, p. 33. This is highly suspicious that someone would conduct so many closely related transactions at Store 1 and 2. The evidence is persuasive to conclude that the Respondent is involved in trafficking.

In summary, the Department established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent trafficked her FAP benefits at both Stores.

Disqualification

A court or hearing decision that finds a client committed IPV disqualifies that client from receiving program benefits. BAM 720, pp. 15-16. 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. 16.

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. 16. Refusal to repay will not cause denial of current or future MA if the client is otherwise eligible. BAM 710 (July 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 FAP concurrent receipt of benefits. BAM 720, p. 16.

In this case, the Department has satisfied its burden of showing that Respondent committed an IPV concerning FAP benefits. Therefore, Respondent is subject to a one-year disqualification under the FAP program. BAM 720, p. 16.

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.

For FAP trafficking, the OI amount for 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 Department's OIG indicates that the time period it is considering the fraud period is August 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012 and that Respondent trafficked \$850 during this time period. See Exhibit 1, p. 5.

As stated in the analysis above, the Department has established that Respondent committed an IPV involving her FAP benefits. Thus, it is found that Respondent received an OI of program benefits in the amount of \$850 from the FAP program. See BAM 720, p. 8.

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 established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent committed an IPV.
2. Respondent did receive an OI of program benefits in the amount of \$850 from the following program(s): FAP.

The Department is ORDERED to initiate recoupment procedures for the amount of \$850 in accordance with Department policy.

