

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 15-004547
Issue No.: 3005
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: July 27, 2015
County: JACKSON

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Eric Feldman

HEARING DECISION FOR INTENTIONAL PROGRAM VIOLATION

Upon the request for a hearing by the Department of Health and Human Services (Department or DHHS), 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 45 CFR 235.110; and with Mich Admin Code, R 400.3130 and 400.3178. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on July 27, 2015, from Detroit, 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 receive an overissuance (OI) of 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 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 [REDACTED], 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 to report changes in group composition.
5. Respondent did not have an 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 [REDACTED] (fraud period).
7. During the fraud period, Respondent was issued \$3,387 in FAP benefits by the State of Michigan, and the Department alleges that Respondent was entitled to \$708 in such benefits during this time period.
8. The Department alleges that Respondent received an OI in FAP benefits in the amount of \$2,679.
9. This was Respondent's first alleged IPV.
10. 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 Health and Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM), Adult Services Manual (ASM), and Reference Tables Manual (RFT).

The Food Assistance Program (FAP) [formerly known as the Food Stamp program] is established by the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, 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 Department of Human Services) administers FAP pursuant to MCL 400.10; the Social Welfare Act, MCL 400.1-.119b; and Mich Admin Code, R 400.3001 to .3015.

Effective October 1, 2014, the Department's OIG requests IPV hearings for the following cases:

- Willful overpayments of \$500.00 or more under the AHH program.

- FAP trafficking overissuances 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 amount for the FIP, SDA, CDC, MA and FAP programs combined is \$500 or more, or
 - the total amount is less than \$500, 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 (October 2014), pp. 12-13; ASM 165 (May 2013), pp. 1-7.

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.

As a preliminary matter, the Department's OIG Investigation Report indicated that Respondent signed an Intentional Program Violation Repayment Agreement, DHS-4350, agreeing to take responsibility for the OI, but she requested an administrative hearing as to the disqualification (Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing, DHS-826). See Exhibit A, p. 4 and BAM 720, p. 15. However, the Department failed to present any evidence of Respondent's signed DHS-4350. As such, the undersigned addressed whether Respondent committed an IPV of her FAP benefits and whether an OI is present in this case.

Clients must report changes in circumstance that potentially affect eligibility or benefit amount. BAM 105 (May 2012), p. 7. Other changes must be reported within 10 days after the client is aware of them. BAM 105, p. 7. These include, but are not limited to, changes in persons in the home. See BAM 105, p. 7.

Additionally, BEM 212 outlines the process in which the Department will help determine who must be included in the FAP group prior to evaluating the non financial and financial eligibility of everyone in the group. BEM 212 (April 2012), p. 1. FAP group composition is established by determining all of the following:

1. Who lives together.
2. The relationship(s) of the people who live together.
3. Whether the people living together purchase and prepare food together or separately.
4. Whether the person(s) resides in an eligible living situation.

BEM 212, p. 1.

In this case, the Department alleges that Respondent committed an IPV of her FAP benefits because she received benefits for a child not residing with her, which caused an overissuance of FAP benefits. Therefore, the Department alleged the total FAP group composition should have been two, rather than three.

Moreover, the Department alleges that Respondent received an OI of \$2,679 during the alleged fraud period. See Exhibit A, p. 4. 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 amount of the OI is the benefit amount the group or provider actually received minus the amount the group was eligible to receive. BAM 720, p. 8

In establishing the OI calculation, the Department presented OI budgets for the time frame of June 2012 to February 2013. See Exhibit A, pp. 50-68. The OI budgets reflected the Department's argument that the group composition should be two during the alleged IPV/OI period. See Exhibit A, pp. 50-68. Moreover, the OI budgets also indicated that Respondent had unreported income. See Exhibit A, pp. 50-68. However, an issue arises in this case as the Department did not argue a failure to report income.

The local office and client or Authorized Hearing Representative (AHR) will each present their position to the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ), who will determine whether the actions taken by the local office are correct according to fact, law, policy and procedure. BAM 600 (January 2015 and April 2015), p. 35. Both the local office and the client or AHR must have adequate opportunity to present the case, bring witnesses, establish all pertinent facts, argue the case, refute any evidence, cross-examine adverse witnesses, and cross-examine the author of a document offered in evidence. BAM 600, pp. 35-36. 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, pp. 37-38.

Based on the foregoing information and evidence, the Department did not satisfy its burden of showing that it acted in accordance with Department policy when it failed to establish an OI amount for FAP benefits. BAM 600, pp. 35-38. A review of the OI budgets found them to be inaccurate. In the present case, the Department did not argue a failure to report income; instead, the Department argued that Respondent withheld or misrepresented her group composition information. In fact, the Department failed to present any verification of Respondent's employment earnings. There is possible evidence to show an OI is present in this case; however, the Department also needs to establish how it calculated the OI. Because the Department failed to establish that it properly calculated the OI budgets, the Department did not satisfy its burden of showing that Respondent received an OI for FAP benefits. BAM 600, pp. 35-38; BAM 700, p. 1; and BAM 720, p. 8.

Furthermore, an IPV requires that an OI exist. Department policy states that suspected IPV means an OI exists for which all three of the following conditions exist as stated above. See BAM 700, p. 7; BAM 720, p. 1. Moreover, the Bridges Policy Glossary (BPG) defines IPV as a benefit overissuance resulting from the willful withholding of information or other violation of law or regulation by the client or his authorized representative. BPG 2014-015 (July 2014), p. 36. Department policy clearly states that a suspected IPV means an OI has to exist. See BAM 700, p. 7; BAM 720, p. 1; and BPG 2014-015, p. 36. Because the Department cannot establish an OI in this case, it cannot establish by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent committed an IPV of her FAP program. Thus, Respondent is not subject to a disqualification from the FAP program. See BAM 720, pp. 12 and 16.

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 committed an IPV.

2. Respondent **did not** receive an OI of program benefits in the amount of \$2,679 from the FAP program.

The Department is **ORDERED** to delete the OI and cease any recoupment action and Respondent is NOT subject to a disqualification from the FAP program.



Eric Feldman
Administrative Law Judge
for Nick Lyon, Director
Department of Health and Human Services

Date Signed: **7/30/2015**

Date Mailed: **7/30/2015**

EF / hw

NOTICE: The law provides that within 30 days of receipt of the above Hearing Decision, the Respondent may appeal it to the circuit court for the county in which he/she lives or the circuit court in Ingham County. A copy of the claim or application for appeal must be filed with the Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS).

cc:

