



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
MICHIGAN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING SYSTEM
Christopher Seppanen
Executive Director

SHELLY EDGERTON
DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]

Date Mailed: December 13, 2016
MAHS Docket No.: 16-007347
Agency No.: [REDACTED]
Petitioner: OIG
Respondent: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Darryl Johnson

HEARING DECISION FOR INTENTIONAL PROGRAM VIOLATION

Upon the request for a hearing by the Department of Health and 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 45 CFR 235.110; and with Mich Admin Code, R 400.3130 and 400.3178. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on December 6, 2016, from Lansing, Michigan. The Department was represented by [REDACTED] [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 May 10, 2016, 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 not sell or trade his FAP for anything other than approved food purchases.
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 May 6, 2015, to May 7, 2015 (fraud period).
7. During the fraud period, Respondent was a FAP recipient
8. The Department alleges that Respondent attempted to traffic his FAP benefits by offering to sell them on Facebook and Twitter.
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 January 1, 2016, 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 (1/1/16), 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 (1/1/16), 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.

In this case, Respondent posted on Facebook and Twitter¹ on May 6 and 7, 2015, “Who asked me about a damn Bridge card? I Got 1 hmu”. (Hmu stands for “hit me up” or contact me.) “So don’t nobody need no bridge card?” See Exhibit 1 Pages 9 and 10. Several people responded to his post, inquiring about the proposed sale.

“Trafficking” is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations (7 CFR 271.2; 7 CFR 273.2; 7 CFR 273.16; 7 CFR 274.7), by statute (MCL 750.300a), and by policy (BAM 110, BAM 401E, BAM 720, BEM 203; DHS Pubs 322, 1010).

7CFR 274.7, DHS-Pub-1010, DHS-Pub-322: FAP benefits must be used by household members to purchase eligible food for the household.

7 CFR 273.16, BAM 720, DHS-Pub-1010 Evidence that the client had prior knowledge of these requirements is also unnecessary to establish an Intentional Program Violation (IPV) for trafficking. IPV is automatically suspected for a client who is alleged to have trafficked FAP benefits.

7CFR 271.2

Trafficking means:

(1) The buying, selling, stealing, or otherwise effecting an exchange of SNAP benefits issued and accessed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, card numbers and personal identification numbers (PINs), or by manual voucher and signature, for cash or consideration other than eligible food, either directly, indirectly, in complicity or collusion with others, or acting alone;

(2) The exchange of firearms, ammunition, explosives, or controlled substances, as defined in section 802 of title 21, United States Code, for SNAP benefits;

(3) Purchasing a product with SNAP benefits that has a container requiring a return deposit with the intent of obtaining cash by discarding the product and returning the container for the deposit amount, intentionally discarding the product, and intentionally returning the container for the deposit amount;

(4) Purchasing a product with SNAP benefits with the intent of obtaining cash or consideration other than eligible food by reselling the product, and subsequently intentionally reselling the product purchased with SNAP benefits in exchange for cash or consideration other than eligible food; or

(5) Intentionally purchasing products originally purchased with SNAP benefits in exchange for cash or consideration other than eligible food.

(6) Attempting to buy, sell, steal, or otherwise affect an exchange of SNAP benefits issued and accessed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, card numbers and personal identification numbers (PINs), or by manual voucher and signatures, for cash or consideration other than eligible food, either directly, indirectly, in complicity or collusion with others, or acting alone. (Emphasis added.)

¹ Facebook references are quoted as they appear on the Facebook and Twitter images, including incorrect spelling, punctuation, etc.

In a memo from the USDA to Regional Directors, dated October 4, 2011, the United States Department of Agriculture expressed guidance regarding the sale of, or intent to sell, FAP cards in public or online through web sites and social media such as Craig's List, Facebook, Twitter, eBay, etc. The USDA determined "the offer to sell SNAP benefits to be a violation of SNAP regulations, constituting an intentional Program violation (IPV)." Similarly, in Fed Reg. Vol 78 No 212, p 65515 published Friday, November 1, 2013, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, published a final rule, amending regulations "to define the term 'trafficking' to include the attempt to buy or sell SNAP benefits in cases where an individual makes the offer to sell SNAP benefits and/or EBT card online or in person."

The Department has presented clear and convincing evidence that Respondent was trafficking his benefits by offering them for sale or exchange through Facebook and Twitter. The Department has established a FAP IPV.

Disqualification

A client who is found to have committed a FAP IPV by a court or hearing decision is disqualified from receiving program benefits. BAM 720, p. 15; BEM 708 (4/1/16), p. 1. Clients are disqualified for ten years for a FAP IPV involving concurrent receipt of benefits, and, for all other IPV cases involving FIP, FAP or SDA, for standard disqualification periods of one year for the first IPV, two years for the second IPV, and lifetime for the third IPV. BAM 720, p. 16. CDC clients who intentionally violate CDC program rules are disqualified for six months for the first occurrence, twelve months for the second occurrence, and lifetime for the third occurrence. BEM 708, p. 1. A disqualified recipient remains a member of an active group as long as he/she lives with them, and other eligible group members may continue to receive benefits. BAM 720, p. 17.

In this case, Respondent has no prior FAP IPV's. He will be disqualified for 12 months.

Overissuance

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

In this case, Respondent was offering to sell or exchange an unspecified amount of FAP. There is no evidence as to any amount that was actually sold, and therefore there is no recoupment that can or will be ordered.

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 not receive an OI of program benefits.

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



DJ/mc

Darryl Johnson
Administrative Law Judge
for Nick Lyon, Director
Department of Health and Human Services

NOTICE OF APPEAL: A party may appeal this Order in circuit court within 30 days of the receipt date. A copy of the circuit court appeal must be filed with the Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS).

A party may request a rehearing or reconsideration of this Order if the request is received by MAHS within 30 days of the date the Order was issued. The party requesting a rehearing or reconsideration must provide the specific reasons for the request. MAHS will not review any response to a request for rehearing/reconsideration.

A written request may be mailed or faxed to MAHS. If submitted by fax, the written request must be faxed to (517) 335-6088; Attention: MAHS Rehearing/Reconsideration Request.

If submitted by mail, the written request must be addressed as follows:

Michigan Administrative Hearings
Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P.O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-8139

DHHS

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Petitioner

[REDACTED]

Respondent

[REDACTED]