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GOVERNOR

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

SHELLY EDGERTON  
DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Date Mailed: December 22, 2016  
MAHS Docket No.: 16-016368

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Vicki Armstrong**

**HEARING DECISION**

Following Petitioner's request for a hearing, this matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and 400.37; 42 CFR 431.200 - 431.250; and 45 CFR 205.10. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on December 7, 2016, from Lansing, Michigan. Petitioner personally appeared and testified. Petitioner's Case Manager, [REDACTED] from [REDACTED], also testified on Petitioner's behalf. Petitioner submitted Exhibit A (1-22), Exhibit B (1-6) and Exhibit C (1-2) as exhibits. Exhibits A, B and C were admitted into evidence.

The Department of Health and Human Services (Department) was represented by Family Independent Manager [REDACTED] testified on behalf of the Department. The Department submitted 207 exhibits which were admitted into evidence. The record was closed at the conclusion of the hearing.

**ISSUE**

Whether the Department properly determined that Petitioner was not disabled for purposes of the State Disability Assistance (SDA) benefit program?

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the competent, material, and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

1. On May 26, 2016, Petitioner applied for SDA.
2. On August 30, 2016, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied Petitioner's SDA application finding he was capable of performing other work. [Dept. Exh. 3-9].

3. On November 3, 2016, the Department sent Petitioner notice that his SDA application was denied.
4. Petitioner alleges disability based on severe depression, anxiety and chronic pain.
5. On [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner underwent a Psychiatric Evaluation. Petitioner's mood was depressed and pessimistic. His insight was fair. Petitioner was diagnosed with major depressive disorder, recurrent episode, severe; unspecified anxiety disorder; unspecified personality disorder; tobacco use disorder, severe; and alcohol use disorder, severe. [Dept. Exh. 85-89]
6. On [REDACTED], Petitioner was admitted to [REDACTED] after self-harming and an attempt to kill himself. Petitioner had been drinking and involved in a motor vehicle accident. He spent one night in jail. A day after being released, he began drinking again and took a kitchen knife and cut his left forearm multiple times. He was transported to the emergency department for sutures. He was then petitioned and admitted to [REDACTED]. He was discharged on [REDACTED], with a diagnosis of major depressive disorder, recurrent, severe; alcohol use disorder, severe; unspecified anxiety disorder; features of borderline personality disorder; superficial lacerations to the left forearm with sutures; alcohol use disorder with recent relapse; and chronic back pain. His prognosis was guarded. [Petitioner Exhibit B].
7. On [REDACTED], Petitioner attended a medication review with his case worker, [REDACTED]. Petitioner had a [REDACTED] pound weight gain since he was last seen on [REDACTED]. His mood was somewhat anxious about the future. He denied any active ideas or plans to harm himself. He was discharged from Pine Rest a week ago and was clinically stable but frustrated with situational stressors. [Dept. Exh. 102-106].
8. On [REDACTED], Petitioner established care with his primary care physician. Petitioner presented with anxious/fearful thoughts, depressed mood, difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep and excessive worry. The depression was aggravated by alcohol use and lack of sleep. The physician noted that Petitioner had been in [REDACTED] in December, 2015, for six days after a suicide gesture. Petitioner reported being in the emergency department six times in the past three years to repair self-inflicted cuts. He also reported numerous injuries and orthopedic procedures. Petitioner had a lot of pain with various issues. His back pain was the worst and was aggravated by most positions or activities. He was unable to mow the lawn due to the pain. His left wrist was very painful with any lifting/carrying. His right knee intermittently popped and hurt. The knee seemed to flare with twisting/torqueing which triggered the pain. Petitioner felt he was unable to be gainfully employed due to his pain. According to Petitioner's medical records from motor vehicle and motorcycle accidents, he had compression fractures of T11-T12 and fractured parts of L1 and L2 in 1999, a left wrist fracture in 2001, a rotator cuff repair in 2004, a boxer fracture of his fifth metacarpal in 2014, and right ankle surgery. He had chronic back pain of the thoracolumbar region which the

physician was unsure was medically correctable. Petitioner was diagnosed with depression, alcohol abuse, hypertension and chronic pain. An x-ray of his left wrist was ordered. [Dept. Exh. 172-176].

9. On [REDACTED], Petitioner met with his therapist at CMH. The therapist indicated that Petitioner presented with moderate depression. He admitted to periodic suicidal thoughts with no intent. [Dept. Exh. 106-108].
10. On [REDACTED], Petitioner presented to his therapist at CMH as dysphoric and congruent. He had poor concentration. He denied suicidality. He reported he had low motivation to leave the house. He also had anhedonia. [Dept. Exh. 120-121].
11. On [REDACTED], Petitioner attended his medication review. Petitioner stated that but [REDACTED] was not helping. He indicated he was having a lot of anxiety around crowds. He was anxious every day and experienced full blown panic attacks once or twice a week. He was unsure what was causing them and thought maybe it was being alone. He reported that he continued to isolate himself in his bedroom throughout the day. He was pessimistic about his ability to change his behavior. Petitioner's affect was somewhat blunted and flat. His thought process was clear. [Dept. Exh. 143-149].
12. On [REDACTED], Petitioner was admitted into the [REDACTED] after trying to commit suicide by sitting in his car in a closed garage with his car and motorcycle running. Petitioner was initially seen in the emergency department where he tried a second time to commit suicide with the nasal cannula tube given for oxygen. He was discharged on [REDACTED] with a diagnosis of major depressive disorder, hypertension, chronic bilateral low back pain, generalized anxiety disorder, dysthymia and alcohol dependence. Petitioner's mother was given his discharge medications to dispense to Petitioner as prescribed. Prognosis was poor if he continued to drink alcohol and neglect the recommendations. [Petitioner Exh. A, pp 2-22].
13. Petitioner is a [REDACTED]-year-old man born on [REDACTED]. He is [REDACTED] and weighs [REDACTED] pounds. He has a ninth grade education. He last worked in May, 2014, as a truck driver. Petitioner was also a journeyman plumber for 14 years.
14. Petitioner was appealing the denial of Social Security disability at the time of the hearing.

### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

Department policies are contained in the Department of Health and Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), Department of Health and Human Services Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM), and Department of Health and Human Services Reference Tables Manual (RFT).

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program, which provides financial assistance for disabled persons, was established by 2004 PA 344. The Department administers the SDA program pursuant to 42 CFR 435, MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and Mich Admin Code, Rules 400.3151 – 400.3180. A person is considered disabled for SDA purposes if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability standards for at least ninety days. Receipt of SSI benefits based on disability or blindness, or the receipt of MA benefits based on disability or blindness, automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program.

Current legislative amendments to the Act delineate eligibility criteria as implemented by department policy set forth in program manuals. 2004 PA 344, Sec. 604, establishes the State Disability Assistance program. It reads in part:

Sec. 604 (1). The department shall operate a state disability assistance program. Except as provided in subsection (3), persons eligible for this program shall include needy citizens of the United States or aliens exempt from the Supplemental Security Income citizenship requirement who are at least 18 years of age or emancipated minors meeting one or more of the following requirements:

(b) A person with a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards, except that the minimum duration of the disability shall be 90 days. Substance abuse alone is not defined as a basis for eligibility.

Specifically, this Act provides minimal cash assistance to individuals with some type of severe, temporary disability which prevents him or her from engaging in substantial gainful work activity for at least ninety (90) days.

A person is disabled for SDA purposes if he or she:

- Receives other specified disability-related benefits or services, see Other Benefits or Services below, or
- Resides in a qualified Special Living Arrangement facility, or
- Is certified as unable to work due to mental or physical disability for at least 90 days from the onset of the disability.
- Is diagnosed as having Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), see Medical Certification of Disability. BEM 261, pp 1-2 (7/1/2014).

Disability is defined as the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months (90 days for SDA). 20 CFR 416.905(a). The person claiming a physical or mental disability has the burden to establish it through the use of competent medical evidence from qualified medical sources such as his or her medical history, clinical/laboratory findings, diagnosis/prescribed treatment, prognosis for recovery and/or medical assessment of ability to do work-related activities or ability to reason and make appropriate mental adjustments, if a mental disability is alleged. 20 CFR 413.913. An individual's subjective pain complaints are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.929(a). Similarly, conclusory statements by a physician or mental health professional that an individual is disabled or blind, absent supporting medical evidence, is insufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.927.

When determining disability, the federal regulations require several factors to be considered including: (1) the location/duration/frequency/intensity of an applicant's pain; (2) the type/dosage/effectiveness/side effects of any medication the applicant takes to relieve pain; (3) any treatment other than pain medication that the applicant has received to relieve pain; and, (4) the effect of the applicant's pain on his or her ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(3). The applicant's pain must be assessed to determine the extent of his or her functional limitation(s) in light of the objective medical evidence presented. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(2).

In order to determine whether or not an individual is disabled, federal regulations require a five-step sequential evaluation process be utilized. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(1). The five-step analysis requires the trier of fact to consider an individual's current work activity; the severity of the impairment(s) both in duration and whether it meets or equals a listed impairment in Appendix 1; residual functional capacity to determine whether an individual can perform past relevant work; and residual functional capacity along with vocational factors (e.g., age, education, and work experience) to determine if an individual can adjust to other work. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945.

If an individual is found disabled, or not disabled, at any step, a determination or decision is made with no need to evaluate subsequent steps. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). If a determination cannot be made that an individual is disabled, or not disabled, at a particular step, the next step is required. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). If an impairment does not meet or equal a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed before moving from Step 3 to Step 4. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945. Residual functional capacity is the most an individual can do despite the limitations based on all relevant evidence. 20 CFR 945(a)(1). An individual's residual functional capacity assessment is evaluated at both Steps 4 and 5. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4). In determining disability, an individual's functional capacity to perform basic work activities is evaluated and if found that the individual has the ability to perform basic work activities without significant limitation, disability will not be found. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv). In general, the individual has the responsibility to prove

disability. 20 CFR 416.912(a). An impairment or combination of impairments is not severe if it does not significantly limit an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.921(a). The individual has the responsibility to provide evidence of prior work experience; efforts to work; and any other factor showing how the impairment affects the ability to work. 20 CFR 416.912(c)(3)(5)(6).

The Administrative Law Judge is responsible for making the determination or decision about whether the statutory definition of disability is met. The Administrative Law Judge reviews all medical findings and other evidence that support a medical source's statement of disability. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

As outlined above, the first step looks at the individual's current work activity. In the record presented, Petitioner is not involved in substantial gainful activity and testified that he has not worked since May, 2014. Therefore, he is not disqualified from receiving disability benefits under Step 1.

The severity of the individual's alleged impairment(s) is considered under Step 2. The individual bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairments. In order to be considered disabled for MA purposes, the impairment must be severe. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(b). An impairment, or combination of impairments, is severe if it significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities regardless of age, education and work experience. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(c). Basic work activities means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. 20 CFR 916.921(b). Examples include:

1. Physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling;
2. Capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking;
3. Understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions;
4. Use of judgment;
5. Responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations; and
6. Dealing with changes in a routine work setting. *Id.*

The second step allows for dismissal of a disability claim obviously lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v Bowen*, 880 F2d 860, 862 (CA 6, 1988). The severity requirement may still be employed as an administrative convenience to screen out claims that are totally groundless solely from a medical standpoint. *Id.* at 863 *citing Farris v Sec of Health and*

*Human Services*, 773 F2d 85, 90 n.1 (CA 6, 1985). An impairment qualifies as non-severe only if, regardless of a petitioner's age, education, or work experience, the impairment would not affect the petitioner's ability to work. *Salmi v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 774 F2d 685, 692 (CA 6, 1985).

In the present case, Petitioner alleges disability due to severe depression, anxiety and chronic pain.

As previously noted, Petitioner bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairment(s). As summarized above, Petitioner has presented some limited medical evidence establishing that he does have some physical limitations on his ability to perform basic work activities, based on his 1999 compression fractures to T11-T12 and fractures to L1 and L2. The medical evidence has established that Petitioner has an impairment, or combination thereof, that has more than a *de minimis* effect on Petitioner's basic work activities. Further, the impairments have lasted continuously for twelve months; therefore, Petitioner is not disqualified from receipt of MA-P benefits under Step 2.

In the third step of the sequential analysis of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the individual's impairment, or combination of impairments, is listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. Petitioner has alleged severe depression, anxiety and chronic pain.

Petitioner has the burden of establishing his disability. Petitioner was discharged from his second psychiatric hospitalization in October, 2016. His discharge diagnosis included major depressive disorder, hypertension, chronic bilateral low back pain, generalized anxiety disorder, dysthymia and alcohol dependence. The record evidence was insufficient to meet a listing because nothing in the record indicated Petitioner was unable to work. Therefore, the analysis continues to Step 4.

Before considering step four of the sequential evaluation process, the Administrative Law Judge must first determine the petitioner's residual functional capacity. (20 CFR 404.1520(e) and 416.920(e)). An individual's residual functional capacity is his/her ability to do physical and mental work activities on a sustained basis despite limitations from his/her impairments. In making this finding, all of the petitioner's impairments, including impairments that are not severe, must be considered. (20 CFR 404.1520(e), 404.1545, 416.920(e), and 416.945; SSR 96-8p).

Based on the record evidence, Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to perform sedentary work as defined in 20 CFR 404.1567(a). In making this finding, the Administrative Law Judge considered all Petitioner's symptoms and the extent to which these symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with the objective medical evidence and other evidence.

Petitioner testified that he could only walk 30 yards, stand for 20-30 minutes, sit for 15 minutes before having to lay down and carry 10 pounds. After considering the evidence

of record, the Administrative Law Judge finds that Petitioner's medically determinable impairments could reasonably be expected to produce the alleged symptoms, and that the Petitioner's statements concerning the intensity, persistence and limiting effects of these symptoms are partially credible.

Next, the Administrative Law Judge must determine at step four whether the petitioner has the residual functional capacity to perform the requirements of her past relevant work. (20 CFR 404.1520(f) and 416.920(f)). The term past relevant work means work performed (either as the petitioner actually performed it or as it is generally performed in the national economy) within the last 15 years or 15 years prior to the date that disability must be established. In addition, the work must have lasted long enough for the petitioner to learn to do the job and have been substantial gainful activity (SGA). (20 CFR 404.1560(b), 404.1565, 416.960(b), and 416.965). If the Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to do her past relevant work, the petitioner is not disabled. If the petitioner is unable to do any past relevant work or does not have any past relevant work, the analysis proceeds to the fifth and last step.

Petitioner's past relevant employment was as a truck driver. The demands of the Petitioner's past relevant work exceed the residual functional capacity. As a result, the analysis continues.

At the last step of the sequential evaluation process (20 CFR 404.1520(g) and 416.920(g)), the Administrative Law Judge must determine whether the petitioner is able to do any other work considering his/her residual functional capacity, age, education, and work experience. If the Petitioner is able to do other work, he/she is not disabled. If the Petitioner is not able to do other work and meets the duration requirements, he/she is disabled.

To determine the physical demands (exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium and heavy. These terms have the same meaning as they have in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, published by the Department of Labor. 20 CFR 416.967. Sedentary work involves lifting no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. 20 CFR 416.967(a). Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 10 pounds. Even though the weight lifted may be very little, a job is in this category when it requires a good deal of walking or standing, or when it involves sitting most of the time with some pushing and pulling of arm or leg controls. 20 CFR 416.967(b). Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. If someone can do medium work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary and light work. 20 CFR 416.967(c). Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of



objects weighing up to 50 pounds. If someone can do heavy work, we determine that he or she can also do medium, light, and sedentary work. 20 CFR 416.967(d).

At Step 5, the burden of proof shifts to the Department to establish that Petitioner does have residual function capacity. The residual functional capacity is what an individual can do despite limitations. All impairments will be considered in addition to ability to meet certain demands of jobs in the national economy. Physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements and other functions will be evaluated. See discussion at Step 2 above.

In this case, Petitioner alleged severe depression, anxiety and chronic pain.

When Petitioner was discharged from the psychiatric hospital on October 25, 2016, after attempting suicide, he was found to be stable and judged not to be a danger to his self or others. While Petitioner's case worker during the hearing in the above captioned matter testified that he did not believe Petitioner would succeed at employment, the record evidence does not support his opinion. There is no discussion by his therapists, doctor or psychiatrist that Petitioner is or was unable to work.

Therefore, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the objective medical evidence on the record does establish that Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to perform other work. Petitioner is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 5 based upon the fact that he has not established by objective medical evidence that he cannot perform sedentary work. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, an individual aged 18 – 44 (Petitioner is 36 years of age), with limited education (Petitioner completed the ninth grade) and a skilled or semi-skilled non-transferable work history who can perform even only sedentary work is not considered disabled pursuant to Medical-Vocational Rule 201.26.

Petitioner has not presented the required competent, material, and substantial evidence which would support a finding that Petitioner has an impairment or combination of impairments which would significantly limit the physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.920(c). Although Petitioner has cited medical problems, the clinical documentation submitted by Petitioner is not sufficient to establish a finding that Petitioner is disabled. There is no objective medical evidence to substantiate Petitioner's claim that the alleged impairment(s) are severe enough to reach the criteria and definition of disabled.

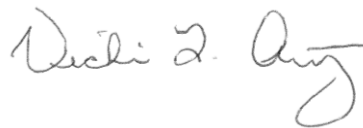
The Department's Bridges Eligibility Manual contains the following policy statements and instructions for caseworkers regarding the State Disability Assistance program: to receive State Disability Assistance, a person must be disabled, caring for a disabled person or age 65 or older. BEM, Item 261, p. 1. Because Petitioner does not meet the definition of disabled and because the evidence of record does not establish that Petitioner is unable to work for a period exceeding 90 days, the Petitioner does not meet the disability criteria for State Disability Assistance benefits.

The Department has established by the necessary competent, material and substantial evidence on the record that it was acting in compliance with Department policy when it determined that Petitioner was not eligible to receive State Disability Assistance.

**DECISION AND ORDER**

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, and for the reasons stated on the record, finds Petitioner not disabled for purposes of the SDA benefit program.

Accordingly, the Department's determination is **AFFIRMED**.



**Vicki Armstrong**

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

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
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[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

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