



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

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

SHELLY EDGERTON
DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Date Mailed: March 1, 2017
MAHS Docket No.: 16-013855
Agency [REDACTED]
Petitioner: [REDACTED]
Respondent: [REDACTED]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Eric J. Feldman

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 February 6, 2017, 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 July 25, 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 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 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 August 1, 2015 to January 30, 2016 (fraud period).
7. The Department alleges that Respondent trafficked ██████████ in FAP benefits.
8. This was Respondent's first alleged IPV.
9. On October 25, 2016, the Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS) sent both parties a notice informing them of a hearing scheduled for November 28, 2016.
10. On December 21, 2016, Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Alice Elkin issued an Order of Adjournment.
11. On January 5, 2017, MAHS sent both parties a notice informing them of a hearing scheduled for February 6, 2017.
12. The January 5, 2017 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 (January 2016), pp. 12-13; ASM 165 (May 2013), pp. 1-2.

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 (January 2016), 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.

BAM 700 defines trafficking as:

- The buying, selling or stealing 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.
- Attempting to buy, sell or steal FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food.

BAM 700, p. 2. Moreover, FAP trafficking includes 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 (January 2015), p. 3.

Title 7 of CFR 274.7(a), eligible food, states:

Program benefits may be used only by the household, or other persons the household selects, to purchase eligible food for the household, which includes, for certain households, the purchase of prepared meals, and for other households residing in certain designated areas of Alaska, the purchase of hunting and fishing equipment with benefits.

Additionally, a person in a federal, state or local correctional facility for more than 30 days is not eligible to receive FAP benefits. BAM 804 (July 2014), p. 1.

In this case, the evidence indicated Respondent's FAP group size was one during the alleged fraud period and there were no other authorized users, which meant Respondent was the only eligible group member to use his Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. However, the Department alleged that Respondent's FAP transaction history showed usage during the time he was incarcerated. As such, the Department argued that Respondent trafficked his FAP benefits because he did fraudulently use, transfer, alter, acquire, or possess coupons, authorization cards, or access devices other than authorized by the Food Stamp Act. See BEM 203, p. 3 and Exhibit A, p. 1.

First, the Department presented credible testimony and evidence showing that Respondent was incarcerated from August 27, 2015 to January 12, 2016. Exhibit A, pp. 4 and 11.

Second, the Department presented Respondent's FAP transaction history. Exhibit A, pp. 12-14. The FAP transaction history showed that from August 31, 2015 to January 4, 2016, Respondent's FAP benefits were used, while he was allegedly incarcerated. Exhibit A, pp. 12-14.

Third, the OIG agent testified that he spoke to Respondent in-person on November 16, 2016, in which he stated he did not know who used his card.

Fourth, the Department presented Respondent's redetermination dated February 23, 2015, to show that he acknowledged his responsibility to report changes as required. Exhibit A, pp. 18-23.

Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) allows clients who receive cash (FIP, SDA etc.), and food (FAP) to receive their benefits using debit card technology. BAM 401E (July 2014), p. 1. Benefits are deposited electronically into a cash and/or food account. BAM 401E, p. 1. Clients access their benefits by using their personal identification number (PIN), along with their Bridge card. BAM 401E, p. 1.

The first line of defense in reducing inappropriate use of Bridge Cards is education. BAM 401E, p. 12. DHS provides client and retailer training. BAM 401E, p. 12. The trainings include guidelines for appropriate use of Bridge Cards as well as fraud and abuse information. BAM 401E, p. 12. Clients are also provided with written materials when they become eligible for assistance. BAM 401E, p. 13. DHS Pub-322, How to Use Your Bridge Card, includes the following information about appropriate use:

- Misuse of Food Benefits is a violation of state and federal laws.
- Do not sell, trade or give away Food Assistance benefits, PIN or Michigan Bridge Card.
- Do not allow a retailer to buy food benefits in exchange for cash.
- Do not use someone else's food benefits or Bridge Card for households.
- It is prohibited to use cash assistance to purchase lottery tickets, alcohol, or tobacco. Cash assistance grants cannot be used for gambling, illegal

activities, massage parlors, spas, tattoo shops, bail-bond agencies, adult entertainment, or cruise ships.

- Clients who purchase any beverages, in any type of container with a deposit, who dump the contents out and return the containers for the deposit, may be disqualified from receiving Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits.
- People who break Food Assistance Program rules may be disqualified from the program, fined, put in prison, or all three; and must repay the food benefits.

BAM 401E, p. 13.

Based on the foregoing information, the Department has established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent committed an IPV of his FAP benefits. As stated previously, the evidence indicated that Respondent's FAP group size was one and there were no authorized users on his account, which meant that the Respondent was the only eligible group member to use his EBT card. Moreover, the evidence established that Respondent's EBT card was used during the time he was incarcerated. Thus, it is highly suspicious how Respondent could conduct several transactions during the time in which he was incarcerated. In fact, several of the transactions were "swiped," which meant that the EBT card had to be present during the transactions conducted and that his PIN had been used. See Exhibit A, pp. 12-14 and BAM 401E, p. 5 (Personal Identification Number (PIN)). As such, the evidence is persuasive that Respondent trafficked his FAP benefits by allowing someone else to use his food benefits who was not an eligible group member/authorized user at the time he was incarcerated. Respondent trafficked his FAP benefits because he did fraudulently use, transfer, alter, acquire, or possess coupons, authorization cards, or access devices other than authorized by the Food Stamp Act. See BEM 203, p. 3 and Exhibit A, p. 1.

Disqualification

A client who is found to have committed an IPV by a court or hearing decision is disqualified from receiving program benefits. BAM 720, p. 15; BEM 708 (April 2016), 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 lives with them, and other eligible group members may continue to receive 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 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 amount for trafficking-related IPV is the value of the trafficked benefits (attempted or actually trafficked) 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

As stated in the analysis above, the Department has established that Respondent committed an IPV involving his FAP benefits. Thus, it is found that Respondent received an OI of program benefits in the amount of [REDACTED] from the FAP program. Exhibit A, pp. 12-14; and 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 FAP program benefits in the amount of [REDACTED]

The Department is **ORDERED** to initiate recoupment/collection procedures for the amount of [REDACTED] in accordance with Department policy, less any amount already recouped and/or collected.

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

EF/tm



Eric J. Feldman
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

Petitioner

[REDACTED]
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CC: [REDACTED]