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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



Date Mailed: March 27, 2017
MAHS Docket No.: 16-018533
Agency No.: [REDACTED]
Petitioner: OIG
Respondent: [REDACTED]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: C. Adam Purnell

HEARING DECISION FOR INTENTIONAL PROGRAM VIOLATION

Upon the request for a hearing by the Department of Health and Human Services ("Department" or "MDHHS"), 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 three-way telephone hearing was held on March 9, 2017, from Lansing, Michigan. [REDACTED] Regulation Agent of the Office of Inspector General (OIG), represented the Department. Respondent appeared via telephone and represented herself.

ISSUES

1. Did Respondent receive an overissuance (OI) of Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits that the Department is entitled to recoup?
2. Did Respondent, by clear and convincing evidence, commit an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)?
3. Should Respondent be disqualified from receiving Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

1. Respondent applied for and received FAP benefits issued by the Department. [Department's Exhibit 1, pp. 12-41, 49-50].

2. At the time of application, Respondent was provided with a document that indicated her rights and responsibilities, including the requirement that she report to the Department a change of address within 10 days of the change. [Dept. Exh. 1, p. 23].
3. Respondent did not have an apparent physical or mental impairment that would limit the understanding or ability to fulfill this requirement. [Dept. Exh. 1, pp. 12-41].
4. Respondent relocated from Michigan to California, but she did not report this change to the Department.
5. The Department's OIG requested a hearing on December 13, 2016, to establish that Respondent received an OI of benefits as a result of having allegedly committed an IPV.
6. The OIG has requested that Respondent be disqualified from receiving program benefits.
7. The Department's OIG indicates that the time period it is considering the fraud period is from February 1, 2015, to April 30, 2015 (fraud period). [Dept. Exh. 1, pp. 49-50].
8. During the alleged fraud period, Respondent was issued \$ [REDACTED] in FAP benefits by the State of Michigan, and the Department alleges that Respondent was entitled to \$ [REDACTED] in such benefits during this time period. [Dept. Exh. 1, pp. 4-5].
9. The Department contends that Respondent received an OI in FAP benefits in the amount of \$ [REDACTED] [Dept. Exh. 1, pp. 4-5].
10. This was Respondent's first alleged FAP IPV.
11. 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 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 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-.3011.

Intentional Program Violation

An Intentional Program Violation (IPV) is a benefit overissuance resulting from the willful withholding of information or other violation of law or regulation by the client or his/her authorized representative. Bridges Program Glossary (BPG) (10-1-2015), p. 36. [Emphasis added].

The OIG represents the MDHHS during the hearing process for IPV hearings. OIG requests IPV hearings when no signed DHS-826 or DHS-830 is obtained, and correspondence to the client is not returned as undeliverable, or a new address is located. **Exception:** For FAP only, OIG will pursue an IPV hearing when correspondence was sent using first class mail and is returned as undeliverable. BAM 720 (1-1-2016), p. 12. [Emphasis in original].

The OIG requests IPV hearings for cases involving:

1. FAP trafficking overissuances that are not forwarded to the prosecutor.
2. 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 \$500 or more, **or**
 - the total OI 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.

See BAM 720, p. 12.

IPV is suspected when there is clear and convincing evidence that the client or CDC provider 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).

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 720, p. 1. [Emphasis in original].

Clear and Convincing Evidence

The Department has the burden of establishing by clear and convincing evidence that the Respondent committed an Intentional Program Violation (IPV). BAM 720, p. 1. The clear and convincing evidence standard, which is the most demanding standard applied in civil cases, is established where there is evidence so clear, direct and weighty and convincing that a conclusion can be drawn without hesitancy of the truth of the precise facts in issue. *Smith v Anonymous Joint Enterprise*, 487 Mich 102; 793 NW2d 533 (2010), reh den 488 Mich 860; 793 NW2d 559 (2010).

Clear and convincing proof is that which produces in the mind of the trier of fact a firm belief or conviction as to the truth of the precise facts in issue. Evidence may be uncontroverted and yet not be clear and convincing. Conversely, evidence may be clear and convincing even if contradicted. *Id.*

In this case, the Department alleges that Respondent committed an IPV when she failed to timely and properly report to the Department a change of address in order to receive an OI of FAP benefits. According to the Department OIG, Respondent moved out of Michigan and continued to use her Michigan-issued FAP benefits. Respondent, on the other hand, contends that she always believed that she did not act intentionally. Although she read and signed documentation concerning the rules, she did not believe

that she was acting unlawfully by using her Michigan EBT card outside of Michigan. In addition, Respondent said that it was her intention to eventually return to Michigan at some point in the future.

Department policy requires FAP recipients to report changes in circumstances that potentially affect eligibility or benefit amount. BAM 105 (10-1-2016), pp. 10-11. Specifically, they must report changes in circumstances within 10 (ten) days after the client is aware of them. BAM 105, p 10. These changes include, but are not limited to, changes regarding: (1) persons in the home; (2) marital status; (3) address and shelter cost changes that result from the move; (4) vehicles; (5) assets; (6) child support expenses paid; (7) health or hospital coverage and premiums; or (8) child care needs or providers. BAM 105, pp. 10-11. [Emphasis added].

This Administrative Law Judge has carefully considered and weighed the testimony and other evidence in the record. The following is the Administrative Law Judge's findings based on the clear and convincing evidence on the whole record.

Based on the above Findings of Facts, there is no dispute that Respondent used her Michigan-issued Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card in California for a period in excess of 30 (thirty) days, during the fraud period. This demonstrates a change of address. Respondent failed to properly and timely report a change to the Department. Respondent was advised of her rights and responsibilities concerning program benefits. Respondent's electronic signature on the online assistance application in this record certifies that she was aware of these rights and responsibilities. Respondent had no apparent physical or mental impairment that limits her understanding or ability to fulfill these reporting responsibilities.

However, the most salient issue is whether the Department has shown, by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent intentionally and fraudulently failed to report a change of address in order to receive an OI of FAP benefits. Respondent testified at the hearing that she knew that using her Michigan-issued EBT card in California was wrong, but that she believed that Michigan would simply cut her off. Essentially, Respondent's testimony is a tacit admission that she was aware that what she did was wrong. This Administrative Law Judge finds that Respondent intentionally and fraudulently failed to report a change of address in order to receive an OI of FAP benefits. Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge finds clear and convincing evidence on the whole record that Respondent committed an IPV because she intentionally failed to report information needed to make a correct benefits determination.

Overissuance

The Department must also show that Respondent received an overissuance (OI) of FAP benefits. According to Department policy, when a client group receives more benefits than they are entitled to receive, the Department must attempt to recoup the OI. BAM 700, (10-1-2016) p. 1. In this matter, Respondent did not dispute the Department's

determination that she received an OI of FAP benefits, or did she dispute the OI calculation amount. Therefore, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the Department has shown that Respondent received an OI of FAP benefits during the above indicated fraud period (February 1, 2015 to April 30, 2015). The Department is entitled to recoup this OI pursuant to BAM 700.

Disqualification

The Department has requested that Respondent be disqualified from receiving program benefits. A disqualified person is “[a] person(s) who is ineligible for program benefits because an eligibility factor is not met or because the person refuses or fails to cooperate in meeting an eligibility factor.” BPG, p. 20. A court or hearing decision that finds a client committed IPV disqualifies that client from receiving program benefits. BAM 720, p. 12. 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. 13.

A disqualification period is defined as, “[t]he length of time, established by MDHHS, during which eligibility for program benefits does not exist.” BPG, p. 20. Clients who commit an IPV are disqualified for a standard disqualification period except when a court orders a different period. BAM 720, p. 16. 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.

Based on the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, this Administrative Law Judge has already determined that Respondent was guilty of an IPV concerning the FAP program. The Department has further shown that Respondent was guilty of her first IPV concerning FAP benefits. Accordingly, Respondent shall be personally disqualified from receiving FAP benefits for a period of 1 year.

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. Respondent did commit an IPV by clear and convincing evidence.
2. Respondent did receive an OI of FAP benefits in the amount of \$ [REDACTED]

IT IS ORDERED THAT the Department may initiate recoupment procedures for the amount of \$ [REDACTED] in accordance with Department policy.

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

IT IS SO ORDERED.

CAP/mc



C. Adam Purnell
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]

DHHS

[REDACTED]

Respondent

[REDACTED]