



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]

Date Mailed: May 30, 2017
MAHS Docket No.: 16-014998
Agency No.: [REDACTED]
Petitioner: OIG
Respondent: [REDACTED]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Lynn M. Ferris

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 [REDACTED], 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 when he had a change in circumstance due to being incarcerated.
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 \$ [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.
8. The Department alleges that Respondent received an OI in FAP benefits in the amount of \$ [REDACTED]
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 U.S. 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 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 (October 1, 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.

In this case, the Department seeks an IPV due to Respondent's failure to report his incarceration to the Department and trafficking of his FAP benefits by allowing others to use his Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card while incarcerated. During the period of his incarceration, the Respondent's EBT card was used for the period [REDACTED], [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED], until there was only \$ [REDACTED] left on the card. The Respondent's EBT card was swiped and keyed in, thus, making it clear someone had access to the Respondent's pin number. [Exhibit A, pp. 13-14.] 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.

The Department presented evidence that the Respondent was incarcerated beginning [REDACTED], in correspondence to the [REDACTED] County Jail, which confirmed that as of [REDACTED], the Respondent was still an inmate and was booked on [REDACTED]. The Respondent's card was used during the period by two individuals caught on tape. [Exhibit A, pp. 15-16.]

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.]

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 (October 2015), p. 3.

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 Department alleges that Respondent committed an IPV by failing to report to the Department that he was incarcerated and allowing others to use his EBT card. The evidence established that Respondent failed to advise the Department that he was incarcerated and thus was not eligible for FAP benefits. BEM 265 provides:

Residents of institutions can qualify for certain program benefits in limited circumstances. This item explains how institutional status affects eligibility.

- **Public nonmedical institution** means a government-operated facility that does not provide medical care (e.g. jail or prison, juvenile detention or secure short-term detention). A community residence facility for fewer than 17 people or a school is not considered a public nonmedical institution.

FAP Only

A person in a facility which provides its residents a majority of their meals can qualify for FAP **if** the facility:

- Is authorized by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to accept Food Assistance; **or**
- Is an eligible group living facility as defined in Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) 615.

The resident must also meet the criteria in the ELIGIBLE PERSONS section in BEM 617. BEM 265 (July 2015), pp. 1-2.

As can be seen the Respondent's incarceration made him ineligible for FAP benefits as she was incarcerated in the ██████ County Jail and was not in a non-profit institution as required by BEM 617.

Further based upon instructions given to all FAP recipients including the Respondent, a pamphlet on how to use your Michigan Bridge Card advises the holder of the card not to allow someone else to use your Food Benefits or Bridge Card, or give away your pin. [Exhibit A, pp. 20-34.]

Clients must report changes in circumstance that potentially affect eligibility or benefit amount. Changes must be reported within 10 days of receiving the first payment reflecting the change. BAM 105 (October 2016), p. 12.

Changes may be reported in person, mail or telephone.

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. 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. Clients are disqualified for ten years for an 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. 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. 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. See Exhibit A, pp. 12-13, and see 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 program benefits in the amount of \$ [REDACTED] from the following program(s) Food Assistance.

The Department is ORDERED to initiate recoupment/collection procedures for the amount of \$ [REDACTED] in accordance with Department policy.

It is FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent be disqualified from receiving Food Assistance for a period of **12 months**.

LMF/jaf



Lynn M. Ferris
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]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Respondent

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

DHHS

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