



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: August 8, 2017
MAHS Docket No.: 17-006617
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, 42 CFR 431.230(b), 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 July 19, 2017, from Detroit, Michigan. The Department was represented by Kristin Vitous, 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], 2017, 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 not aware of the responsibility to use FAP benefits for lawful purchases. (Exhibit A, pp. 40-70).
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 January 1, 2015, through February 28, 2016, (fraud period).
7. During the fraud period, Respondent was issued \$462.44 in FAP benefits by the State of Michigan; and the Department alleges that Respondent was entitled to \$0.00 in such benefits during this time period because it alleges he trafficked his FAP benefits.
8. The Department alleges that Respondent received an OI in FAP benefits in the amount of \$462.44.
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 United States Postal Service 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 October 1, 2014, 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 \$500.00 or more, or
 - the total amount is less than \$500.00, 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), p. 5.

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.

In this case, the Department alleges that Respondent committed an IPV because he trafficked his FAP benefits at [REDACTED], [REDACTED], Michigan, (Store). Trafficking is the buying or selling of FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food. BAM 700 (May 2014), p. 2; see also Department of Health and Human Services, Bridges Policy Glossary (BPG) (July 2014), p. 45. Trafficking also includes (i) fraudulently using, transferring, altering, acquiring, or possessing coupons, authorization cards, or access devices, or (ii) redeeming or presenting for payment coupons known to be fraudulently obtained or transferred. BEM 203 (July 2014 and January 2015), p. 3. The federal regulations define trafficking to include “attempting to buy, sell, steal, or otherwise affect an exchange of [FAP] benefits issued and accessed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) . . . for cash or consideration other than eligible food, either directly, indirectly, in complicity or collusion with others, or acting alone.” 7 CFR 271.2. In this case, the Department established that it adequately notified Respondent at the time of application and when he received the Bridge Card onto which his FAP benefits were transferred via EBT that he could not traffick his FAP benefits (Exhibit A, pp. 41-70).

The Department presented evidence that Store was found in administrative hearings before the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to have trafficked FAP benefits and had its authorization to accept FAP benefits permanently revoked. The revocation occurred on April 19, 2016; and the owner pled guilty to the violation on December 21, 2016. Exhibit A, pp. 9-10. To support a trafficking case against Respondent, the Department must establish, by clear and convincing evidence, that *Respondent* engaged in trafficking when he used his FAP benefits at Store.

In support of its contention that Respondent trafficked his FAP benefits, the Department presented (i) a FAP transaction history for Respondent showing his FAP purchases at Store date, time, and amount and (ii) a benefit summary inquiry showing that he received FAP benefits during the fraud period. Respondent’s transaction history at Store showed several high-dollar amounts for single transactions, ranging from \$87.53 to \$79.09 and many transactions over \$50.00. Exhibit A, pp. 37-39. The Department pointed out that Respondent’s transactions were not supported by Store’s inventory and layout, pointing out that Store was a convenience store with a limited inventory of chips, pop, candy and no fresh meat; had no baskets or carts; and had only a single point-of-sale device which was behind bulletproof glass with limited counter space.

A review of Respondent’s transactions at Store, coupled with evidence that Store was a trafficking establishment, was sufficient to establish by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent trafficked at Store. Because the Department established by clear and

convincing evidence that Respondent trafficked his FAP benefits, it has established that he committed an IPV in connection with his FAP case.

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 a FAP IPV involving concurrent receipt of benefits, and, for all other IPV cases involving FAP, 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.

As discussed above, the Department has established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent committed an IPV concerning FAP. Because this is Respondent's first IPV, he is subject to a one-year disqualification from receipt of FAP benefits.

Overissuance

When a client group receives more benefits than entitled to receive, the Department must attempt to recoup the OI. BAM 700, p. 1. The OI amount for a trafficking-related IPV is the value of the trafficked benefits as determined by (i) a court decision, (ii) the individual's admission, or (iii) 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, which can be established through circumstantial evidence. BAM 720, p. 8.

As discussed above, the Department presented clear and convincing evidence, through its testimony and Respondent's transaction history, to support its allegation that Respondent trafficked at Store. The Department identified all transactions on Respondent's transaction history at Store in excess of \$50.00 as involving trafficking, because such transactions were outside the norm for a convenience store of Store's size. These transactions total \$462.44. Therefore, the Department is entitled to recoup and/or collect \$462.44 for trafficked FAP benefits at Store from January 1, 2015, through February 28, 2016. The transactions on the transaction history at Store that were in excess of the norm for a convenience store were demonstrated on the Respondent's FAP transaction history at the store. The identified transactions at issue on the transaction history at Store total \$462.44. Therefore, the Department's evidence established that \$462.44 in FAP transactions at Store involved trafficking.

DECISION AND ORDER

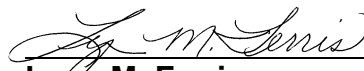
The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, and for the reasons stated on the record, if any, concludes that:

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 \$462.44 from the following program(s) Food Assistance.

The Department is ORDERED to initiate recoupment/collection procedures for the amount of \$462.44 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

DHHS

Wayne (76)

Petitioner

OIG
PO Box 30062
Lansing MI 48909-7562

Respondent

[REDACTED]
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