



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
MICHIGAN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING SYSTEM

SHELLY EDGERTON
DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Date Mailed: July 6, 2018
MAHS Docket No.: 18-000506
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 2, 2018, 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 the 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 January 8, 2018, 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 not to buy, sell, trade, exchange, or otherwise traffic FAP 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 December 1, 2016 through February 28, 2017 (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 received an OI in FAP benefits in the amount of [REDACTED] as a result of trafficked FAP benefits.
8. This was Respondent's **first** alleged IPV.
9. A notice of hearing was mailed to Respondent at the last known address and **was not** returned by the United States Postal Services 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 (October 2017), p. 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 (January 2018), p. 8; 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 by trafficking [REDACTED] of FAP benefits at Dion's Party Store - [REDACTED] (Store), a convenience store. Trafficking is the buying or selling of FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food. BAM 700, p. 1. 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 (October 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 she received the Bridge Card that she could not traffick FAP benefits (Exhibit A, pp. 103-118).

The Department presented evidence that after an investigation by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Store was charged with trafficking and then permanently disqualified from the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as FAP in Michigan. The Department presented evidence from the USDA investigation showing that Store is approximately 2,000 square feet in size, has two old dirty and rusted shopping carts, no optical scanner for ease of transactions, a bulletproof glass turnstile preventing quick and easy transactions, and no bundled meat or seafood. Store does have as part of its inventory limited selections of fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and long-shelf-life items. However, many of the shelves at Store are barren and lacking any significant amount of inventory. In pictures, the dust accumulation on products is easily seen and is evidence of low turnover of inventory. In addition, Store purchases items from other stores to create its inventory as shown by name brand products which are only bought and sold at select stores.

The USDA charged store with having an unusual number of transactions ending in same-cents values, an unusual number of transactions wherein the majority or all of individual recipient benefits were exhausted in short time periods, excessively-large-purchase values, and transactions being completed by the same or different users in time frames which were too short to be considered credible. Store had EBT transactions completed by other customers as high as [REDACTED], transactions completed for hundreds of dollars one minute apart, and a significant number of transactions ending in even-cents values such as \$[REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. However, to support a trafficking case against Respondent, the Department must establish, by clear and convincing evidence, that Respondent engaged in trafficking when she used her FAP benefits at Store.

The Department contended that Respondent's FAP purchase on Respondent's EBT card from December 2016 through February 2017, were trafficked transactions because Store did not have the inventory or infrastructure to support purchases of such a large value. The 10 transactions in question totaled [REDACTED]. Respondent's EBT card had

ten transactions all of even-dollar amounts during the fraud period including 3 transaction for [REDACTED], one for [REDACTED] a transaction for [REDACTED], 2 for [REDACTED], and (1) for [REDACTED]. On January 23, 2017 the Respondent completed 3 transactions all for even dollar amounts for [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Exhibit A, p. 52-53. As discussed above, Store's inventory does not support transactions of such large values. In addition, it is highly unusual to have so many transactions in such a short period of even-dollar amounts with the only odd cents transactions made to either zero out the account or when the remaining FAP benefit amount was low. Finally, Respondent had access to and visited other stores with greater inventory and better quality, such as [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. Respondent visited several of these stores within days of the fraudulent transactions and made large purchase.

The foregoing evidence, coupled with the USDA's finding that Store trafficked FAP benefits, was sufficient when viewed under the totality of the circumstances, to establish by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent trafficked her FAP benefits at Store.

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 10 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.

In this case, the Department has satisfied its burden of showing that Respondent committed an IPV. This was Respondent's first IPV. Therefore, she is subject to a one-year disqualification under the FAP program.

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 amount as determined by an administrative hearing decision, repayment and disqualification agreement, or court decision. BAM 720, p. 8.

In this case, the Department alleged that Respondent trafficked [REDACTED] in FAP benefits from December 1, 2016 through February 28, 2017. A review of the Respondent's IG-312 EBT History presented by the Department supports FAP trafficking in the amount alleged. (Exhibit A, p. 50.) Therefore, the Department is entitled to recoup [REDACTED] from Respondent, the amount of trafficked FAP benefits.

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**.

LF/cg



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) 763-0155; 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

Via Email:

MDHHS-Livingston-Hearings
OIG Hearings
Recoupment
MAHS

Respondent – Via First-Class Mail:

