



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
LANSING

SHELLY EDGERTON
DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED], MI [REDACTED]

Date Mailed: August 9, 2018
MAHS Docket No.: 18-000907
Agency No.: [REDACTED]
Petitioner: OIG
Respondent: [REDACTED]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Kevin Scully

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 with Mich Admin Code, R 400.3130 and R 400.3178. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on July 10, 2018, from Lansing, Michigan. The Department was represented by Nicholas Sultana, Regulation Agent of the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Respondent represented himself and his wife [REDACTED] testified on his behalf. Abdul Chowdhury translated for Respondent.

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 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 is an adult member of a Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefit group. Exhibit A, pp 52-53.

2. Respondent used Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits at a business known to engage in benefit trafficking. Exhibit A, pp 97-101.
3. Respondent also made purchases at numerous business that do not engage in Food Assistance Program (FAP) trafficking. Exhibit A, pp 72-83.
4. Respondent made purchases at this business, which fits the description of a convenience store, that were inconsistent with the known inventory and point of sale equipment of that business. Exhibit A, pp 129-142.
5. Respondent made purchases totaling \$5,503.49 that are consistent with known patterns of Food Assistance Program (FAP) trafficking. Exhibit A, pp 61-69.
6. The Department's OIG filed a hearing request on February 2, 2018, to establish an OI of benefits received by Respondent as a result of Respondent having allegedly committed an IPV. Exhibit A, p 3.
7. On February 2, 2018, the Department sent Respondent an Intentional Program Violation Repayment Agreement (DHS-4350) with notice of a \$5,503.49 overpayment, and a Request for Waiver of Disqualification Hearing (DHS-826). Exhibit A, pp 6-9.
8. This was Respondent's first established IPV.
9. A notice of hearing was mailed to Respondent at the last known address and was not returned by the US Postal Service as undeliverable.
10. Respondent offered medical records dated June 13, 2018, and June 14, 2018, as evidence of impairments that would limit his understanding or ability to fulfill his duties and responsibilities as a Food Assistance Program (FAP) recipient. Respondent Exhibit 1.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Department policies are contained in the Department of Health and Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), Department of Health and Human Services Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM), Department of Health and Human Services Reference Tables Manual (RFT), and Department of Health and Human Services Emergency Relief Manual (ERM).

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.

The Department's OIG requests IPV hearings for the following cases:

- FAP trafficking OIs 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 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.

Department of Health and Human Services Bridges
Administrative Manual (BAM) 720 (January 1, 2016), pp 12-13.

When a client group receives more benefits than it is entitled to receive, the Department must attempt to recoup the overissuance. Department of Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM) 700 (January 1, 2018), p 1.

An IPV is suspected for a client who is alleged to have trafficked FAP benefits. BAM 720, p. 1.

Federal regulations provide the following definition of intentional program violations:

Definition of intentional Program violation. Intentional Program violations shall consist of having intentionally:

- (1) Made a false or misleading statement, or misrepresented, concealed or withheld facts; or
- (2) Committed any act that constitutes a violation of SNAP, SNAP regulations, or any State statute for the purpose of using, presenting, transferring, acquiring, receiving, possessing or trafficking of SNAP benefits or EBT cards. 7 CFR 273.16(c).

Respondent used FAP benefits at a business known to engage in the trafficking of benefits. This business fits the description of a convenience store with limited food inventory. High volume purchases, such as the ones made by Respondent, were inconsistent with the known inventory and point of sale equipment at that business. High value transactions at this business fit a known pattern of FAP trafficking, which creates an overissuance in the amount of the benefits trafficked. Some of Respondent's individual purchases were not unusually high for a convenience store with limited inventory, but were made within such a short period of time that the total purchase amount fit a known pattern of benefit trafficking.

Respondent testified that all of his purchases were for food items that may be purchased with FAP benefits. Respondent testified that if any purchases made with his FAP benefits were not authorized by FAP regulations, then it was the business known to engage in benefit trafficking that engaged in misconduct. Respondent testified that despite being given responsibility for managing his family's resources for purchasing food, he was not capable of understanding what was going on due to his inability to speak and understand English. Respondent also testified that he has physical and/or mental impairments that prevented him from understanding the duties and responsibilities of being a FAP recipient.

Testimony and other evidence must be weighed and considered according to its reasonableness. *Gardiner v Courtright*, 165 Mich 54, 62; 130 NW 322 (1911); *Dep't of Community Health v Risch*, 274 Mich App 365, 372; 733 NW2d 403 (2007). Moreover, the weight and credibility of this evidence is generally for the fact-finder to determine. *Dep't of Community Health*, 274 Mich App at 372; *People v Terry*, 224 Mich App 447, 452; 569 NW2d 641 (1997). In evaluating the credibility and weight to be given the testimony of a witness, the fact-finder may consider the demeanor of the witness, the reasonableness of the witness's testimony, and the interest, if any, the witness may have in the outcome of the matter. *People v Wade*, 303 Mich 303 (1942), cert den, 318 US 783 (1943).

This Administrative Law Judge finds Respondent's testimony not to be credible. Respondent testified that he did not understand how to use FAP benefits properly but also that the purchases he made were legitimate purchases of food items. The hearing record supports a finding that Respondent was capable of using his FAP benefits at legitimate businesses in accordance with FAP guidelines during this same period. Respondent made numerous suspicious purchases fitting known patterns of FAP trafficking as well as numerous legitimate purchases. Further, the medical records offered by Respondent as evidence of his incapacity are not relevant to the period of alleged fraud in this case because they are dated over a year after the alleged FAP trafficking took place. Even if those records were relevant to the period of alleged fraud, they do not support a finding that Respondent had physical and/or mental impairments that prevented from his duties and responsibilities as a FAP recipient.

The evidence supports a finding that Respondent was a willing accomplice to the misconduct perpetrated by this business known to engage in FAP trafficking.

However, some of Respondent's purchases were suspected of being FAP trafficking solely based on the fact that the transactions ended in 50 or 0 cents. This Administrative Law Judge finds that insufficient evidence was presented on the record to establish that these low volume purchases were not legitimate purchases while other higher volume purchases were not suspected of being trafficking.

Respondent made purchases that fit known patterns of FAP trafficking in the amounts of \$226.17 on 3/10/2015, \$207.52 on 3/11/2015, \$201.91 on 3/12/2015, \$33.12 on 3/12/2015, \$99.89 on 3/12/2015, \$46.50 on 10/11/2015, \$1.00 on 10/11/2015, \$76.98 on 1/20/2016, \$51.50 on 1/25/2016, \$87.00 on 2/13/2016, \$44.41 on 2/20/2016, \$133.41 on 3/2/2016, \$275.41 on 3/3/2016, \$222.22 on 3/4/2016, \$298.93 on 3/5/2016, \$293.95 on 3/6/2016, \$223.95 on 3/9/2016, \$255.50 on 3/10/2016, \$289.50 on 3/11/2016, \$234.47 on 3/12/2016, \$0.01 on 3/14/2016, \$73.51 on 3/14/2016, \$251.92 on 4/7/2016, \$54.00 on 4/14/2016, \$41.50 on 5/16/2016, \$36.50 on 7/9/2016, \$137.44 on 8/7/2016, \$91.98 on 8/17/2016, \$48.00 on 8/20/2016, \$103.31 on 8/23/2016, \$51.98 on 9/10/2016, \$4.50 on 9/10/2016, \$36.34 on 9/19/2016, \$52.00 on 11/4/2016, \$31.25 on 12/10/2016, \$325.97 on 3/1/2017, \$352.81 on 3/2/2017, and \$293.13 on 3/3/2017.

The total amount of FAP benefits that fit known patterns of benefit trafficking were in the amount of \$5,289.49.

The Department has the burden of establishing by clear and convincing evidence that the Respondent committed an Intentional Program Violation (IPV). 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.*

Trafficking includes the buying, selling or stealing or otherwise effecting an exchange of FAP benefits issued and accessed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, card numbers and personal identification numbers (PINs), or by manual voucher and signature, for cash or consideration other than eligible food, either directly, indirectly, in complicity or collusion with others, or acting alone. Trafficking also includes attempting to buy, sell, steal, or otherwise affect an exchange of FAP benefits issued and accessed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, card numbers and personal identification numbers (PINs), or by manual voucher and signatures, for cash or consideration other than eligible food, either directly, indirectly, in complicity or collusion with others, or acting alone. BAM 700, p 2.

FAP trafficking is a fraudulent transfer of benefits that must be established by clear and convincing evidence and must never be presumed. Fraud may be established by circumstantial evidence and can be inferred from the evidence with facts which are inconsistent with an honest person. See *Foodland Distributors v Al-Naimi*, 220 Mich App 453 (1996), p 381.

This Administrative Law Judge finds that the Department established by clear and convincing evidence that the Respondent intentionally used Food Assistance Program (FAP) benefits in a manner other than authorized by the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, 7 USC 2011 to 2036a, and that fits the Department's definition of benefit trafficking in Department of Health and Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM) 720 (January 1, 2016), pp 1-22.

A court or hearing decision that finds a client committed IPV disqualifies that client from receiving program benefits. BAM 720, p. 15-16. A disqualified recipient remains a member of an active group as long as the recipient lives with them, and other eligible group members may continue to receive benefits. BAM 720, p. 16.

Clients who commit an IPV are disqualified for a standard disqualification period except when a court orders a different period, or except when the OI relates to MA. BAM 720, p. 13. Refusal to repay will not cause denial of current or future MA if the client is otherwise eligible. BAM 710 (July 1, 2013), p. 2. 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.

The record evidence indicates that this is Respondent's first established IPV.

The Department has established an Intentional Program Violation (IPV).

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 Food Assistance Program benefits in the amount of \$5,289.49.
3. The Department is ORDERED to reduce the OI to \$5,289.49, and initiate recoupment procedures in accordance with Department policy.
4. It is FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent be disqualified from the Food Assistance Program (FAP) for a period of 12 months.

KS/hb



Kevin Scully
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

DHHS

Clarence Collins
12140 Joseph Campau
Hamtramck, MI 48212

Wayne County (District 55), DHHS

Policy-Recoupment via electronic mail

M. Shumaker via electronic mail

Petitioner

OIG
PO Box 30062
Lansing, MI 48909-7562

Respondent

[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED], MI [REDACTED]