



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
MICHIGAN OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES

ORLENE HAWKS
DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Date Mailed: July 5, 2019
MOAHR Docket No.: 19-002748
Agency No.: [REDACTED]
Petitioner: OIG
Respondent: [REDACTED]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: John Markey

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 Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), particularly 7 CFR 273.16. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on July 1, 2019, from Detroit, Michigan. The Department was represented by [REDACTED] Regulation Agent of the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Respondent did not appear. The hearing was held in Respondent's absence pursuant to 7 CFR 273.16(e). During the hearing, 79 pages of documents were offered and admitted as Department's Exhibit A, pp. 1-79.

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) with respect to FAP?
3. Should Respondent be disqualified from receiving 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. On [REDACTED] 2016, Respondent submitted to the Department an application for FAP benefits. Respondent signed the application, thereby acknowledging that he had received, read, and agreed with the information in the assistance application Information Booklet, including the Important Things to Know

publication. That publication informed Respondent that trading or selling FAP benefits was considered FAP trafficking and that such action violated the law and if proven, would result in criminal and/or civil penalties, including disqualification from the program. Exhibit A, pp. 45-75.

2. Respondent was approved for, received, and regularly used his FAP benefits. Exhibit A, pp. 39-44; 76-77.
3. At some point, the United States Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) conducted an investigation of a store named [REDACTED]. At the conclusion of the investigation, FNS issued to [REDACTED] a February 6, 2018 letter informing the store that it was permanently disqualified from FAP as a result of FNS' finding that the store had engaged in FAP trafficking. Exhibit A, pp. 11-38.
4. As a result of FNS' finding that [REDACTED] engaged in widespread FAP trafficking, the Department conducted an investigation into some of the clients who made purchases at the store.
5. From October 8, 2016 through March 20, 2017, Respondent made 15 purchases at [REDACTED]. Thirteen of those 15 purchases were flagged by the Department as fraudulent due to meeting the Department's criteria for trafficking at that particular store. Exhibit A, pp. 39-40.
6. On March 7, 2019, the Department's OIG filed a hearing request to establish an OI of benefits received by Respondent as a result of Respondent having allegedly committed an IPV by engaging in 13 fraudulent transactions at [REDACTED] from October 8, 2016 through March 20, 2017, totaling \$786.54. Exhibit A, pp. 1-9; 39-40.
7. The Department's OIG indicates that the time period it is considering the fraud period is October 8, 2016 through March 20, 2017. Exhibit A, pp. 1-9.
8. The Department alleges that Respondent received an OI in FAP benefits in the amount of \$786.54. Exhibit A, pp. 1-9.
9. This was Respondent's first alleged IPV, and the OIG requested Respondent be disqualified from receiving FAP benefits for one year. Exhibit A, pp. 1-9.
10. Respondent did not appear at the hearing to rebut any of the Department's allegations.
11. The Notice of Hearing sent to Respondent's most recent address on file was not returned 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.

The Department has alleged that 13 of Respondent's suspicious purchases at [REDACTED] during the alleged fraud period were instances of trafficking. The Department is seeking an order finding Respondent committed an IPV with respect to FAP and requiring Respondent to repay the amount allegedly trafficked.

Intentional Program Violation

An IPV is suspected for a client who is alleged to have trafficked FAP benefits. BAM 720 (October 2015), p. 1. Trafficking is defined as actually or attempting to buy, sell, or steal FAP benefits for cash or consideration other than eligible food. BAM 700 (October 2015), p. 2; 7 CFR 271.2.

An IPV requires that the Department establish by clear and convincing evidence that the client has trafficked FAP benefits. BAM 720, p. 1; see also 7 CFR 273.16(e)(6). Clear and convincing evidence is evidence which is so clear, direct, weighty, and convincing that it enables a firm belief as to the truth of the allegations sought to be established. *In re Martin*, 450 Mich 204, 227; 538 NW2d 399 (1995) (citing *In re Jobes*, 108 NJ 394 (1987)).

In this case, the Department has met its burden. After an investigation, FNS determined that [REDACTED] engaged in wide-ranging fraud with respect to accepting and redeeming FAP benefits. The investigation showed that [REDACTED] had limited food inventory and no carts or baskets. The Department established that Respondent made 13 large and/or suspicious EBT transactions at the store from October 8, 2016 through March 20, 2017.

During the hearing, the Department presented Respondent's FAP usage history and issuance summary. Besides the transactions in question, Respondent's FAP usage appeared to be ordinary. The transactions in question, however, were far from ordinary.

The 13 suspicious purchases, which averaged over \$60 each, are highly suspicious. They are for an excessive amount given the inventory of the store and the other shopping options available. After viewing the photographs of the inventory and

Respondent's purchase history, it seems highly unlikely for those purchases to have been legitimate. Additionally, a number of the large purchases were made within minutes of one another, highly unlikely for legitimate purchases. In addition, within one mile of ██████ were two fully stocked, large grocery store chains, thus showing that ██████ was not Respondent's only option.

The evidence shows that Respondent engaged in a pattern of suspicious FAP purchases from a store that was proven to be engaged in fraudulent FAP trafficking during the same time. Respondent did not appear at the hearing to provide any explanation for his EBT transactions at ██████. Accordingly, the Department's unrebutted testimony and exhibits established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent engaged in unlawful FAP trafficking.

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, pp. 15-16; 7 CFR 273.16(b). In general, Clients are disqualified 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.

In this case, there is no evidence that Respondent has ever been found to have committed an IPV related to FAP benefits. Thus, this is Respondent's first IPV related to FAP benefits. Therefore, Respondent is subject to a one-year disqualification and removal from the FAP group.

Overissuance

When a client group receives more benefits than it is entitled to receive, the Department must attempt to recoup the OI. BAM 700, p. 1; 7 CFR 273.18. The OI amount for trafficking-related IPV is the value of the trafficked benefits as determined by: (1) a court decision; (2) the individual's admission; or (3) 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. BAM 720, p. 8; 7 CFR 273.18(c)(2). In this case, the evidence shows that Respondent completed 13 transactions that qualified as trafficking. The total value of those 13 purchases was \$786.54. Thus, Respondent was overissued \$786.54.

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:

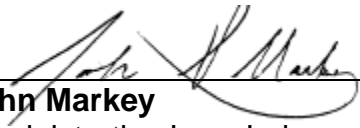
1. The Department established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent committed an IPV.

2. Respondent received an OI of FAP benefits in the amount of \$786.54, which the Department is entitled to recoup and/or collect.
3. Respondent shall be disqualified from receiving FAP benefits for a period of one year.

IT IS ORDERED that the Department is authorized to initiate recoupment and/or collection procedures for the amount of \$786.54, less any amounts already recouped and/or collected.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent is disqualified from receiving FAP benefits for a period of one year.

JM/cg



John Markey
Administrative Law Judge
for Robert Gordon, Director
Department of Health and Human Services

