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GOVERNOR

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

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DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED], MI [REDACTED]

Date Mailed: February 7, 2020
MOAHR Docket No.: 19-012420
Agency No.: [REDACTED]
Petitioner: [REDACTED]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Carmen G. Fahie

HEARING DECISION

Following Petitioner's request for a hearing, this matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and 400.37; 42 CFR 431.200 to 431.250. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on December 17, 2019, from Lansing, Michigan. The Petitioner was represented by himself and his mother, [REDACTED]. The Department of Health and Human Services (Department) was represented by A.J. Evans, Assistance Payments Supervisor. On January 8, 2020, the additional medical information was received, and the record was closed.

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined that Petitioner was not disabled for purposes of the State Disability Assistance (SDA) benefit programs?

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], 2019, Petitioner applied for SDA.
2. On November 4, 2019, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied the Petitioner's application for SDA per BEM 261 because the nature and severity of Petitioner's impairments would not preclude work activity at the above stated level for 90 days and is capable of performing other work under Medical Vocation Grid Rule 202.21 per 20 CFR 416.920(f).
3. On November 6, 2019, the Department Caseworker sent Petitioner a notice that his application was denied.

4. On November 13, 2019, the Department received a hearing request from Petitioner, contesting the Department's negative action.
5. Petitioner is a [REDACTED]-year-old man whose date of birth is [REDACTED], 1970. Petitioner is [REDACTED]" tall and weighs [REDACTED] pounds. Petitioner completed High School. Petitioner can read and write and do basic math. Petitioner was last employed as a [REDACTED] Lot Associate on a part time basis for two years. He was previously employed as a field services technician installing satellite TVs and dishes, for the past 14 years, which is his pertinent work history.
6. Petitioner's alleged impairments are Huntington's Disease.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program, which provides financial assistance for disabled persons, was established by 2004 PA 344. The Department administers the SDA program pursuant to 42 CFR 435, MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and Mich Admin Code, Rules 400.3151 – 400.3180. A person is considered disabled for SDA purposes if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability standards for at least ninety days. Receipt of SSI benefits based on disability or blindness, or the receipt of MA benefits based on disability or blindness, automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program.

The Department conforms to State statute in administering the SDA program.

2000 PA 294, Sec. 604, of the statute states:

Sec. 604. (1) The department shall operate a state disability assistance program. Except as provided in subsection (3), persons eligible for this program shall include needy citizens of the United States or aliens exempted from the supplemental security income citizenship requirement who are at least 18 years of age or emancipated minors meeting 1 or more of the following requirements:

- (a) A recipient of supplemental security income, social security, or medical assistance due to disability or 65 years of age or older.
- (b) A person with a physical or mental impairment which meets federal supplemental security income disability standards, except that the minimum duration of the

disability shall be 90 days. Substance abuse alone is not defined as a basis for eligibility.

Pursuant to Federal Rule 42 CFR 435.540, the Department uses the Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) policy in determining eligibility for disability. Under SSI, disability is defined as:

...the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.... 20 CFR 416.905.

A set order is used to determine disability. Current work activity, severity of impairments, residual functional capacity, past work, age, or education and work experience are reviewed. If there is a finding that an individual is disabled or not disabled at any point in the review, there will be no further evaluation. 20 CFR 416.920.

Medical evidence may contain medical opinions. Medical opinions are statements from physicians and psychologists or other acceptable medical sources that reflect judgments about the nature and severity of the impairment(s), including symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, what an individual can do despite impairment(s), and the physical or mental restrictions. 20 CFR 416.927(a)(2).

The Administrative Law Judge is responsible for making the determination or decision about whether the statutory definition of disability is met. The Administrative Law Judge reviews all medical findings and other evidence that support a medical source's statement of disability. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

For mental disorders, severity is assessed in terms of the functional limitations imposed by the impairment. Functional limitations are assessed using the criteria in paragraph (B) of the listings for mental disorders (descriptions of restrictions of activities of daily living, social functioning; concentration, persistence or pace; and ability to tolerate increased mental demands associated with competitive work). 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 1, 12.00(C).

The residual functional capacity is what an individual can do despite limitations. All impairments will be considered in addition to ability to meet certain demands of jobs in the national economy. Physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements and other functions will be evaluated. 20 CFR 416.945(a).

To determine the physical demands (exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium and heavy. These terms have the same meaning as they have in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, published by the Department of Labor. 20 CFR 416.967.

Pursuant to 20 CFR 416.920, a five-step sequential evaluation process is used to determine disability. An individual's current work activity, the severity of the impairment, the residual functional capacity, past work, age, education and work experience are evaluated. If an individual is found disabled or not disabled at any point, no further review is made.

The first step is to determine if an individual is working and if that work is "substantial gainful activity" (SGA). If the work is SGA, an individual is not considered disabled regardless of medical condition, age or other vocational factors. 20 CFR 416.920(b).

Secondly, the individual must have a medically determinable impairment that is "severe" or a combination of impairments that is "severe." 20 CFR 404.1520(c). An impairment or combination of impairments is "severe" within the meaning of regulations if it significantly limits an individual's ability to perform basic work activities. An impairment or combination of impairments is "not severe" when medical and other evidence establish only a slight abnormality or a combination of slight abnormalities that would have no more than a minimal effect on an individual's ability to work. 20 CFR 404.1521; Social Security Rulings (SSRs) 85-28, 96-3p, and 96-4p. If the Petitioner does not have a severe medically determinable impairment or combination of impairments, the Petitioner is not disabled. If the Petitioner has a severe impairment or combination of impairments, the analysis proceeds to the third step.

The third step in the process is to assess whether the impairment or combination of impairments meets a Social Security listing. If the impairment or combination of impairments meets or is the medically equivalent of a listed impairment as set forth in Appendix 1 and meets the durational requirements of 20 CFR 404.1509, the individual is considered disabled. If it does not, the analysis proceeds to the next step.

Before considering step four of the sequential evaluation process, the trier must determine the Petitioner's residual functional capacity. 20 CFR 404.1520(e). An individual's residual functional capacity is his ability to do physical and mental work activities on a sustained basis despite limitations from his impairments. In making this finding, the trier must consider all of the Petitioner's impairments, including impairments that are not severe. 20 CFR 404.1520(e) and 404.1545; SSR 96-8p.

The fourth step of the process is whether Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to perform the requirements of his past relevant work. 20 CFR 404.1520(f). The term past relevant work means work performed (either as Petitioner actually performed it or as is it generally performed in the national economy) within the last 15 years or 15 years prior to the date that disability must be established. If Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to do past relevant work, then Petitioner is not disabled. If Petitioner is unable to do any past relevant work or does not have any past relevant work, the analysis proceeds to the fifth step.

In the fifth step, an individual's residual functional capacity is considered in determining whether disability exists. An individual's age, education, work experience and skills are

used to evaluate whether an individual has the residual functional capacity to perform work despite limitations. 20 CFR 416.920(e).

Here, Petitioner has satisfied requirements as set forth in steps one and two of the sequential evaluation. However, Petitioner's impairments do not meet a listing as set forth in Appendix 1, 20 CFR 416.926 for step 3. Therefore, vocational factors will be considered to determine Petitioner's residual functional capacity to do relevant work and past relevant work.

In the present case, Petitioner was seen by his treating psychiatrist at the [REDACTED] on December 24, 2019. He was provided 16 minutes of psychotherapy, and medication management for the remainder of a 30 minute visit. He was accompanied by his mother. He was seen as a follow-up for Huntington's disease. The psychiatrist did note mild cognitive decline. His speech was intact. He denied active depression, suicidal or homicidal ideation at this time. His affect was oddly unaffected by his current difficulties. He had no hallucinations. His thought process and associations were logical and coherent. There was no evidence of delusional obsessions. He was fully oriented and overtly cognitively intact. His fund of knowledge was adequate. His insight and judgment were both limited. He was diagnosed with adjustment disorder versus normal reaction to a distressing situation, single confusion no episode, unclear etiology, possible sleep deprivation, possible medication affect, early cognitive decline suggestion of Huntington's related dementia, and Huntington's disease. Petitioner does not currently present as a risk to himself and others based on a complete risk assessment and suicide screen completed. His medication was adjusted as medically required. The treating psychiatrist's clinical impression was that Petitioner is no longer able to work due to a progressive neurological condition with psychiatric disturbances and the beginnings of dementia. Petitioner Exhibit 1, pgs. A-D.

On August 27, 2019, Petitioner was seen by his treating psychiatrist for a follow-up visit with the [REDACTED]. His psychiatrist met with him for 30 minutes today where he provided supportive psychotherapy for 16 minutes, and medical case management services for the remainder of the time. He has tested positive for Huntington's. His father has Huntington's also. He seemed to be remarkably accepting and is trying to be positive about some of the newer symptom management and treatments. He is the most concerned about his children. His treating psychiatrist saw continuing dyskinetic movements of the extremities and trunk. His mood was surprisingly calm where he denied suicidal or homicidal ideation at this time. He had a full affect with no hallucinations. Petitioner was logical and coherent with no evidence of delusions or obsessions. He was fully oriented and overtly cognitively intact. His recent and remote memory were intact. Petitioner had an adequate fund of knowledge. His insight and judgment were intact. He was diagnosed with adjustment disorder versus normal reaction to a distressing situation. Petitioner does not currently present as a risk to himself or others due to a complete risk assessment and suicide screen being completed. His medication was continued as medically required.

Supportive therapy was provided with a focus on symptom management, illness acceptance, and stress reduction. Department Exhibit 1, pgs. 143-150.

On October 14, 2019, Petitioner underwent a physical examination with an independent medical examiner at [REDACTED]. He is a [REDACTED]-year-old male who presents to the clinic with an alleged disability of Huntington's disease. Petitioner states he has a family history of the disease where his father is currently diagnosed where he has trouble with comprehension and processing questions, anxiety, confrontational issues, and balance issues. He states he has noticed he has been tripping and falling more. His symptoms started in January 2019 where he noticed he was having memory loss, anger issues, anxiety, and balance issues. His gait is slightly unsteady. He would need a walking aid to prevent falls. Clinical evidence does not support the inability to stand from a seated position or maintain balance in a standing position. He could not perform heel to shin. Petitioner has lumbar tenderness with palpitation. He has painful and decreased range of motion of the lumbar spine. He has decreased range of motion of the bilateral knees with palpable repeaters noted bilaterally. Department Exhibit 1, pgs. 135-140.

On August 8, 2019, the Petitioner was seen by his genetic specialist at the [REDACTED]. He was given a positive test result for Huntington's disease. He shared some neurological concerns and he was referred to the neurology movement disorders clinic. The Petitioner was counseled to continue to pursue his goals in life, living life to the fullest, and not be defined by his Huntington's disease. Because the diagnosis is difficult to hear and to adopt to the results, a meeting with a therapist can be helpful. Department Exhibit 1, pgs. 227-233.

This Administrative Law Judge finds that Petitioner has a positive diagnosis of Huntington's disease. He is in the early stages where he does trip and fall occasionally. Petitioner would benefit from a walking aid to prevent him from falling. There was no evidence of a severe thought disorder or risk factors. At this time, Petitioner is capable of performing light work.

It is the finding of this Administrative Law Judge, based upon the medical evidence and objective, physical and psychological findings that Petitioner testified that he does perform most of his daily living activities. Petitioner does feel that his condition has worsened because he is currently having problems with his speech. Petitioner stated that he does have mental impairments of manic where he is taking medication and in therapy at the [REDACTED]. The Petitioner doesn't smoke cigarettes but does use chewing tobacco. He drinks alcohol rarely. He has never used illegal and illicit drugs. Petitioner did not feel there was any work he could do.

At Step 4, this Administrative Law Judge finds that Petitioner has not established that he cannot perform any of his prior work. He was previously employed as a [REDACTED] Lot Associate on a part time basis for 2 years. He was previously employed as field services technician installing satellite TVs and dishes, for the past 14 years, which is his pertinent work history. At this time even with his Huntington's Disease diagnosis, he should be able to perform at least light work. He has issues with his physical mobility,

which may require a walking aide. Petitioner is in therapy and taking medication for his mental impairments. There was no evidence of a severe thought disorder or risk factors. Therefore, Petitioner is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 4. Petitioner is capable of performing his past work at this time. However, the Administrative Law Judge will still proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine whether or not Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his prior jobs.

The objective medical evidence on the record is insufficient that Petitioner lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his previous employment or that he is physically unable to do any tasks demanded of him. Petitioner's testimony as to his limitation indicates his limitations are non-exertional and exertional.

For mental disorders, severity is assessed in terms of the functional limitations imposed by the impairment. Functional limitations are assessed using the criteria in paragraph (B) of the listings for mental disorders (descriptions of restrictions of activities of daily living, social functioning; concentration, persistence, or pace; and ability to tolerate increased mental demands associated with competitive work)... 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, App. 1, 12.00(C).

In the instant case, Petitioner testified that he has Huntington's Disease. Petitioner is taking medication and in therapy for his mental impairments. See MA analysis step 2. There was no evidence of a serious thought disorder or risk factors.

In the final step of the analysis, the trier of fact must determine if the Petitioner's impairment(s) prevent the Petitioner from doing other work. 20 CFR 416.920(f). This determination is based upon the Petitioner's:

1. residual functional capacity defined simply as "what can you still do despite your limitations?" 20 CFR 416.945;
2. age, education, and work experience, 20 CFR 416.963-965; and
3. the kinds of work which exist in significant numbers in the national economy which the Petitioner could perform despite her limitations. 20 CFR 416.966.

The residual functional capacity is what an individual can do despite limitations. All impairments will be considered in addition to ability to meet certain demands of jobs in the national economy. Physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements and other functions will be evaluated. 20 CFR 416.945(a).

To determine the physical demands (exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium and heavy. These terms have the same meaning as they have in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, published by the Department of Labor. 20 CFR 416.967.

Sedentary work. Sedentary work involves lifting no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. 20 CFR 416.967(a).

Light work. Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 10 pounds. Even though the weight lifted may be very little; a job is in this category when it requires a good deal of walking or standing, or when it involves sitting most of the time with some pushing and pulling of arm or leg controls. 20 CFR 416.967(b).

Medium work. Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. If someone can do medium work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary and light work. 20 CFR 416.967(c).

Heavy work. Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds. If someone can do heavy work, we determine that he or she can also do medium, light, and sedentary work. 20 CFR 416.967(d).

At Step 5, Petitioner can meet the physical requirements of light work, based upon Petitioner's physical abilities. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a younger age individual with a high school education, and an unskilled and semi-skilled work history, who is limited to light work, is considered not disabled. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Rule 202.02. The Medical-Vocational guidelines are not strictly applied with non-exertional impairments such as Huntington's Disease. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Section 200.00. Using the Medical-Vocational guidelines as a framework for making this decision and after giving full consideration to Petitioner's mental and physical impairments, the Administrative Law Judge finds that Petitioner could perform light work and that Petitioner does not meet the definition of disabled under the SDA program.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, and for the reasons stated on the record, if any, finds Petitioner not disabled for purposes of the SDA benefit program. Petitioner could perform light work and Petitioner does not meet the definition of disabled under the SDA program.

Accordingly, the Department's determination is **AFFIRMED**.

CF/hb



Carmen G. Fahie
Administrative Law Judge
for Robert Gordon, 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 Office of Administrative Hearings and Rules (MOAHR).

A party may request a rehearing or reconsideration of this Order if the request is received by MOAHR 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. MOAHR will not review any response to a request for rehearing/reconsideration.

A written request may be mailed or faxed to MOAHR. If submitted by fax, the written request must be faxed to (517) 763-0155; Attention: MOAHR Rehearing/Reconsideration Request.

If submitted by mail, the written request must be addressed as follows:

Michigan Office of Administrative Hearings and Rules
Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P.O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-8139

DHHS

Lenawee County via electronic mail

BSC4 via electronic mail

L. Karadsheh via electronic mail

Petitioner

[REDACTED], MI [REDACTED]