



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

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

SHELLY EDGERTON
DIRECTOR

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

Date Mailed: November 27, 2018
MAHS Docket No.: 18-008006
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 November 21, 2018, from Lansing, Michigan. The Department was represented by Derrick Gentry, 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, 52 pages of documents were offered and admitted as Department's Exhibit A, pp. 1-52.

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 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 October 27, 2016, Respondent submitted to the Department an application for FAP benefits. Exhibit A, pp. 12-20.

2. On the application, Respondent acknowledged that he received, reviewed, and agreed with the pamphlet entitled "Important Things to Know" (also known as DHS-PUB-1010). Exhibit A, pp. 12-20.
3. DHS-PUB-1010 advised Respondent that trading, selling, or misusing 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. 20, 35.
4. Respondent did not have any apparent physical or mental impairment that would limit his understanding or ability to fulfill his responsibilities to the Department. Exhibit A, p. 16.
5. Respondent was approved for FAP benefits. On February 17, 2017, the Department loaded \$3,120 onto Respondent's EBT card. Exhibit A, p. 24.
6. On February 18, 2017, Respondent's EBT card was used to make a transaction at a Gordon's Food Service (GFS) in ██████████, Michigan. The transaction was for \$1,561.65. Exhibit A, p. 27, 28-30.
7. On February 20, 2017, Respondent's EBT card was used to make a transaction at a GFS in ██████████, Michigan. The transaction was for \$1,500. Exhibit A, pp. 27, 31-33.
8. The GFS purchases included items that could not reasonably be considered to be for household consumption for a household of one. Exhibit A, pp. 12, 14-27.
9. Respondent's case was flagged for fraud, and Ms. Bridges was assigned to investigate the matter.
10. Ms. Bridges reviewed the transaction history and account information and concluded that Respondent's February 18, 2017 and February 20, 2017, GFS transactions were not bona fide purchases of eligible food products meant for household consumption.
11. Ms. Bridges further concluded that sufficient evidence existed to allege an IPV against Respondent for engaging in fraudulent trafficking of FAP benefits.
12. The Department's OIG filed a hearing request on August 1, 2018, to establish an OI of benefits received by Respondent as a result of Respondent having allegedly committed an IPV by engaging in fraudulent transactions on February 18, 2017 and February 20, 2017, totaling \$3,061.65.
13. The OIG requested that Respondent be disqualified from receiving FAP benefits for a period of one year.

14. The Department's OIG indicates that the time period it is considering the fraud period is February 18, 2017, through February 28, 2017 (fraud period).
15. 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), 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 Respondent committed an IPV by trafficking \$3,061.65 of FAP benefits on February 18, 2017 and February 20, 2017, via two fraudulent transactions at GFS.

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 720 (January 2016), p. 1.

An IPV is also suspected for a client who is alleged to have trafficked FAP benefits. BAM 720, p. 1. Trafficking includes not only the improper purchase, sale, or use of FAP benefits, but also the attempt to purchase, sell, or use FAP benefits for consideration other than eligible food. BAM 700 (October 2016), p. 2. Trafficking 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). In order to sustain an IPV for trafficking, the Department must prove

by clear and convincing evidence that the client intentionally committed an act involving the unlawful transfer or attempted transfer of FAP benefits. BAM 720, p. 1; 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 addition, a person who knowingly uses, transfers, acquires, alters, purchases, possesses, presents for redemption or transports food stamps or coupons or access devices other than as authorized by the Food Stamp Act of 1977, is guilty of the crime of Food Assistance Program (FAP) trafficking. MCL 750.300(a).

In this case, the Department has established that Respondent was aware that misuse of his FAP benefits is a violation of state and federal laws for which he may be disqualified from the program, fined, and incarcerated, amongst other potential penalties. Further, the Department made Respondent aware that it was unlawful to allow non-group members to use his card or exchange her FAP benefits for anything other than eligible food.

The Department alleges that the February 18, 2017 and February 20, 2017, GFS purchases using Respondent's EBT account were instances of trafficking. The Department conceded that all items purchased in the suspected trafficking transactions were eligible food items. The Department's position in this case is that Respondent purchased so much product that it could not reasonably be consumed by a household of one. Thus, Respondent must have been doing something other than using the benefits for his own household's consumption. The Department contends that if Respondent was providing the benefits to someone who was not eligible to receive them, Respondent must have received something in return, which is unlawful trafficking.

After reviewing the record, the Department has met its burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent engaged in FAP trafficking in each of the two transactions. On February 18, 2017, Respondent completed a transaction at GFS using his EBT card. The first transaction was for over \$1,500 and included a mix of items that would most reasonably be expected to be included on a shopping list for a commercial entity, including hundreds of pounds of bulk meats. While checking out, Respondent was accompanied by an unidentified male.

On February 20, 2017, Respondent completed another transaction at a different GFS using his EBT card. That transaction was for \$1,500 and included a similar mix of items as the purchase just two days earlier. Again, Respondent was accompanied by the same unidentified male at checkout. Thus, in just three days, Respondent spent over \$3,000 at two different GFS locations, mostly on bulk items that are most reasonably expected to be purchased by commercial eateries. The timing and large dollar amounts are clearly not indicative of normal purchases made for household consumption. Clearly, Respondent used his benefits to purchase items for other, non-household members.

While there is no direct evidence of consideration received by Respondent in exchange for the unlawfully transferred FAP benefits, I find by clear and convincing evidence that the amounts in question were unlawfully trafficked. Respondent provided to someone else

other than a member of his FAP group the proceeds of his FAP benefits in a manner that is highly indicative of fraud. The evidence on the record clearly shows that two highly suspicious purchases were made using Respondent's EBT card and pin within a short period. The nature of the purchases is indicative of trafficking. When combined with Respondent's lack of any rebuttal testimony regarding the suspicious incidents, the record is both clear and convincing that Respondent engaged in FAP trafficking, which is an IPV. Despite being made aware of the requirements and penalties for noncompliance, the evidence clearly shows Respondent engaged in fraudulent transactions on February 18, 2017 and February 20, 2017.

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 FIP, FAP or SDA, 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, 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.

Overissuance

For FAP benefits, the measure of an overissuance is the amount of benefits trafficked (stolen, traded, bought or sold) or attempted to be trafficked. BAM 700, pp 1-2, emphasis added. The undersigned Administrative Law Judge finds that, on February 18, 2017 and February 20, 2017, Respondent trafficked \$3,061.65 in FAP benefits illegally in violation of BAM 700 and 7 CFR 273.16(c)(2). Thus, the Department is entitled to recoup and/or collect \$3,061.65 from Respondent.

DECISION AND ORDER

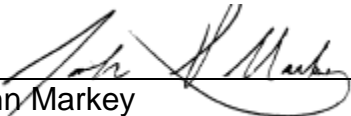
The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, and for the reasons stated on the record, if any, concludes that:

1. The Department has established by clear and convincing evidence that Respondent committed an IPV.
2. Respondent received an OI of FAP benefits in the amount of \$3,061.65.
3. Respondent is disqualified from receiving FAP benefits for a period of 12 months.

IT IS ORDERED that the Department may initiate recoupment and/or collection procedures for the amount of \$3,061.65 established in this matter, less any amounts already recouped and/or collected.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent is disqualified from receiving FAP benefits for a period of 12 months.

JM/nr



John Markey
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

LaClair Winbush
17455 Grand River
Detroit, MI
48227

Wayne 31 County DHHS- via electronic
mail

MDHHS- Recoupment- via electronic mail

M. Shumaker- via electronic mail

Petitioner

OIG
PO Box 30062
Lansing, MI
48909-7562

Respondent

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