



GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS

ORLENE HAWKS  
DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]

Date Mailed: April 26, 2019  
MOAHR Docket No.: 19-001810  
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 March 28, 2019, from Lansing, Michigan. The Petitioner was represented by herself and her sister, [REDACTED]. The Department of Health and Human Services (Department) was represented by April Nemec, Hearing Facilitator.

### **ISSUE**

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

### **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], 2018, Petitioner applied for SDA.
2. On January 9, 2019, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied 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 202.13 per 20 CFR 416.920(f).
3. On January 14, 2019, the Department Caseworker sent Petitioner a notice that her application was denied.
4. On February 26, 2019, the Department received a hearing request from Petitioner, contesting the Department's negative action.

5. Petitioner is a 50-year-old woman whose date of birth is [REDACTED], 1968. Petitioner is 4' 9" tall and weighs 190 pounds. Petitioner completed High School and a college certificate in business systems. Petitioner can read and write and do basic math. Petitioner was last employed as an accounts payable clerk at the medium level in March 2009. She was also employed as a receiving and marketing clerk at the medium level. Her pertinent work history is in accounting.
6. Petitioner's alleged impairments are bipolar disorder, depression, severe anxiety, borderline personality disorder, seizures, epilepsy, chronic pain in back, spine fusion in October 18, 2017 surgery, CHI, DDD, pinched nerve, muscle spasms, and neuropathy.
7. Petitioner was seen by her treating specialist at [REDACTED] on February 21, 2019. She was seen as a follow up to an MRI. She is currently using a walker even though she has 5/5 lower extremity strength. She walks with an anteriorly hunched gait. Her treating specialist recommended surgery of a L2-L3 decompression with a possible fusion as well with pedicle screws, particularly a transpedicular approach to the disc. Petitioner was assessed with spinal stenosis of the lumbar region without neurogenic claudication, intervertebral disc disorders with radiculopathy, lumbar region, and unspecified osteoarthritis. Petitioner Exhibit 1, pgs. 6E-10I.
8. On August 22, 2018, Petitioner underwent an MRI of the brain with Insight Imaging. The radiologist's clinical impression was that there was no evidence of demyelinating disease. There was no substantial change with a prior study from August 5, 2018. Department Exhibit 1, pgs.214-215.
9. On August 21, 2016 Petitioner underwent an x-ray of the cervical spine without contrast with Insight Imaging. The radiologist's clinical impression was that there was disc herniation at C4 through C7. No significant changes from previous examination on November 23, 2014. Department Exhibit 1, pgs. 504-505.
10. On July 31, 2018, Petitioner was seen by her treating nurse practitioner at [REDACTED]. She was seen as a follow up for depression and an MRI. There was an improvement of her initial symptoms for depression. Her GAF was 60. There was no evidence of a severe thought disorder or risk factors. For her bipolar disorder, her compliance with her medications was discussed. Her mood is stable at this time. She had an MRI, which showed moderate to severe narrowing without new finding after a fall. Petitioner used a walker for balance. Department Exhibit 1, pgs. 384-393.

### **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 her ability to do physical and mental work activities on a sustained basis despite limitations from her 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 the Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to perform the requirements of her past relevant work. 20 CFR 404.1520(f). The term past relevant work means work performed (either as the 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 the Petitioner has the residual functional capacity to do past relevant work, then the Petitioner is not disabled. If the 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 her treating specialist at [REDACTED] on February 21, 2019. She was seen as a follow up to an MRI. She is currently using a walker even though she has 5/5 lower extremity strength. She walks with an anteriorly hunched gait. Her treating specialist recommended surgery of a L2-L3 decompression with a possible fusion as well with pedicle screws particularly if we do a transpedicular approach to the disc. The Petitioner was assessed with spinal stenosis of the lumbar region without neurogenic claudication, intervertebral disc disorders with radiculopathy, lumbar region, and unspecified osteoarthritis. Petitioner Exhibit 1, pgs. 6E-10I.

On August 22, 2018, Petitioner underwent an MRI of the brain with Insight Imaging. The radiologist's clinical impression was that there was no evidence of demyelinating disease. There was no substantial change with a prior study from August 5, 2018. Department Exhibit 1, pgs.214-215.

On August 21, 2016, Petitioner underwent an x-ray of the cervical spine without contrast with Insight Imaging. The radiologist's clinical impression was that there was disc herniation at C4 through C7. No significant changes from previous examination in November 23, 2014. Department Exhibit 1, pgs. 504-505.

On July 31, 2018, Petitioner was seen by her treating nurse practitioner at [REDACTED]. She was seen as a follow up for depression and an MRI. There was an improvement of her initial symptoms for depression. Her GAF was 60. There was no evidence of a severe thought disorder or risk factors. For her bipolar disorder, her compliance with her medications was discussed. Her mood is stable at this time. She had an MRI, which showed moderate to severe narrowing without new finding after a fall. Petitioner used a walker for balance. Department Exhibit 1, pgs. 384-393.

This Administrative Law Judge finds that Petitioner does have physical limitations with her back. She did have back surgery in 2017. Petitioner might have another surgery, which is proposed by her treating surgeon. Her lower extremity strength is 5/5, but she still uses a walker. There was no evidence of a severe thought disorder or risk factors. Her mood was stable at this time. She should be capable of performing at least 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 she does perform most of her daily living activities. Petitioner does feel that her condition has worsened because her back worsened, increase of seizures-petit mal, and increase in pain. Petitioner stated that she does have mental impairments where she is taking medication and in therapy. Petitioner smokes ½ a pack of cigarettes a day. She stopped drinking in the 2000's, where before she drank too much. She does not or has ever used illegal and illicit drugs. Petitioner did not feel there was any work she could do.

At Step 4, this Administrative Law Judge finds that Petitioner has not established that she cannot perform any of her prior work. She was previously employed as an accounts payable clerk at the medium level in March 2009. She was also employed as a receiving and marketing clerk at the medium level. Her pertinent work history is in accounting. Petitioner is taking medications and in therapy for her mental impairments. She has had back surgery in 2017, which may limit her to light work. Therefore, Petitioner is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 4. Petitioner is capable of performing her past work at the light level. 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 her 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 her previous employment or that she is physically unable to do any tasks demanded of her. Petitioner's testimony as to her limitation indicates her 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 she has bipolar disorder, depression, severe anxiety, borderline personality disorder, seizures, and epilepsy. Petitioner is taking medication and in therapy for her mental impairments. See MA analysis step 2. There was no evidence of a serious thought disorder or risk factors. She should be able to perform work.

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 the Petitioner's physical abilities. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a closely approaching advanced age individual with a high school education and more, and a semi-skilled and unskilled work history, who is limited to light work, is considered not disabled. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Rule 202.13. The Medical-Vocational guidelines are not strictly applied with non-exertional impairments such as bipolar disorder, depression, severe anxiety, borderline personality disorder, seizures, and epilepsy. 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. The Petitioner could perform light work and that the Petitioner does not meet the definition of disabled under the SDA program.

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

CF/hb



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**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**

Tamara Morris  
125 E. Union St 7th Floor  
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Genesee County (Union), DHHS

BSC2 via electronic mail

L. Karadsheh via electronic mail

**Petitioner**

[REDACTED]