



STATE OF MICHIGAN

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS  
MICHIGAN OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES  
SUZANNE SONNEBORN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MARLON I. BROWN, DPA  
ACTING DIRECTOR

[REDACTED]  
MI [REDACTED]

Date Mailed: [REDACTED] 8, 2023  
MOAHR Docket No.: 23-005658  
Agency No.: [REDACTED]  
Petitioner: [REDACTED]

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Aaron McClintic**

### **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 October 10, 2023, from Lansing, Michigan. The Petitioner was represented by himself. The Department of Health and Human Services (Department) was represented by Ashley Davis AP Manager. Department Exhibit 1, pp. 1-1047 was received and admitted.

### **ISSUE**

Did the Department properly determine 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. Petitioner applied for SDA on [REDACTED] 2023.
2. The Medical Review Team denied the application on July 17, 2023.
3. On July 18, 2023, Notice of Case Action was sent to Petitioner informing him that his SDA application was denied.
4. Petitioner filed a request for hearing on August 22, 2023, regarding the SDA denial.
5. A telephone hearing was held on October 10, 2023.
6. Petitioner is [REDACTED] tall and weighs approximately [REDACTED] pounds.

7. Petitioner is [REDACTED] years of age.
8. Petitioner's impairments have been medically diagnosed as back pain, infection following spinal surgery, sinusitis and anxiety.
9. Petitioner has the following symptoms: pain, fatigue, insomnia.
10. Petitioner completed a GED.
11. Petitioner is able to read, write, and perform basic math skills.
12. Petitioner is not working. Petitioner last worked in 2015 at a chemical plant.
13. Petitioner lives alone.
14. Petitioner testified that he cannot perform some household chores.
15. Petitioner takes the following prescribed medications:
  - a. Gabapentin
  - b. Suboxone
  - c. Ibuprofen
16. Petitioner testified to the following physical limitations:
  - a. Sitting: 30 minutes
  - b. Standing: 10-15 minutes
  - c. Walking: 1 block
  - d. Bend/stoop: some difficulty
  - e. Lifting: 10 lbs.
  - f. Grip/grasp: some limitations
17. Petitioner testified to experiencing pain at a high level of 8 on a ten point scale on an everyday basis with some pain always present at a low level of 4-5.
18. An x-ray report of Petitioner's thoracic spine from [REDACTED] 14, 2022, showed the following under FINDINGS: "The patient has undergone prior T9-L2 posterior fusion with T11 and T12 corpectomies and cage placement. Findings of prior left lateral fusion spanning T10-L1. Hardware is fully engaged without loosening, lucency, migration or fracture. No bony fracture. Osteopenia. Multilevel degenerative disc change predominating in the middle thoracic spine. Paraspinal soft tissue fullness in the inferior thoracic region adjacent to the corpectomy levels, more conspicuous compared to prior exams. Impression: unremarkable postsurgical change spanning T9-L2." (Ex. 1, p.396)
19. An MRI report of Petitioner's Thoracic and Lumbar Spine showed the following under FINDINGS: "Postsurgical change spans T9-L2. Lateral location of the left L2 pedicle screw. No other significant hardware abnormality. Fairly well marginated fluid within the surgical bed, presumably representing seroma. Grade 1 anterolisthesis of T2 on T3, T3 on T4 and T4 on T5. Grade 1 retrolisthesis of

T8 and T9, L1 on L2, L2 on L3, L3 on L4, L4 on L5, L5 on S1. Subtly diminished T1 weighted, increased STIR signal within the T10 and superior L1 vertebrae. Other significant marrow signal abnormality. Grossly unremarkable cord signal based on assessment. No thoracic or high-grade lumbar thecal canal narrowing. Minimal bilateral T2-T3, negligible T3-4 left, negligible left T5-6, minimal left T8-9, minimal bilateral T9-10, minimal left and more mild right T10-11, moderate to severe left and no right T11-12, mild left T12-S1, minimal bilateral L2-3, minimal bilateral L3-4, mild left and more pronounced right L4-5, moderate bilateral L5-S1 neural foraminal narrowing. Focal right paracentral disc protrusion at T7-8. Lobulated central, right greater than left paracentral and right greater than left lateral recess disc protrusion at T8-9 with .7mm of superior extrusion. Additional multilevel disc bulging and low grade facet arthropathy present throughout the thoracic spine. Multilevel disc bulging at all lumbar levels with degenerative disc change present at L3-5. Small central and larger bilateral foraminal L3-4, central and right paracentral as well as right greater than left foraminal L4-5, small central and larger bilateral foraminal components at L5-S1. Diffuse lumbar spine arthropathy. Both exited L5 nerve roots and contacted by lateral disc bulging. Inferior surgical disc osteophyte complex formation, incompletely characterized. Small right pleural effusion. Right basilar pulmonary parenchymal. No additional unexpected contrast enhancement." Ex. 1, pp. 547-548

### **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), and Department of Health and 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.

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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.

Pursuant to Federal Rule 42 CFR 435.540, the Department uses the Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) policy in determining eligibility for disability under the MA-P program. 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.

Federal regulations require that the Department use the same operative definition for “disabled” as used for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) under Title XVI of the Social Security Act. 42 CFR 435.540(a).

“Disability” is:

...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.

In determining whether an individual is disabled, 20 CFR 416.920 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activity, the severity of the impairment(s), residual functional capacity, and vocational factors (i.e., age, education, and work experience) are assessed in that order. When a determination that an individual is, or is not, disabled can be made at any step in the sequential evaluation, evaluation under a subsequent step is not necessary.

First, the trier of fact must determine if the individual is working and if the work is substantial gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.920(b). In this case, the Petitioner is not working. Therefore, the Petitioner is not disqualified at this step in the evaluation.

The second step to be determined in considering whether the Petitioner is considered disabled is the severity of the impairment. In order to qualify the impairment must be considered severe, which is defined as an impairment which significantly limits an individual’s physical or mental ability to perform basic work activities. Examples of these include:

1. Physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, reaching, carrying, or handling;
2. Capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking;

3. Understanding, carrying out, and remembering, simple instructions;
4. Use of judgment;
5. Responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers, and usual work situations;  
and
6. Dealing with changes in a routine work setting. 20 CFR 416.921(b).

In this case, the Petitioner's medical evidence of record supports a finding that Petitioner has significant physical and mental limitations upon Petitioner's ability to perform basic work activities such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling. Medical evidence has clearly established that the Petitioner has an impairment (or combination of impairments) that has more than a minimal effect on the Petitioner's work activities. See Social Security Rulings: 85-28, 88-13, and 82-63.

In the third step of the analysis, the trier of fact must determine if the Petitioner's impairment (or combination of impairments) is listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. This Administrative Law Judge finds that the Petitioner's medical record does not support a finding that the Petitioner's impairment(s) is a "listed impairment" or equal to a listed impairment. See Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR Part 404, Part A. Listings 1.04 and 1.02 were considered.

The person claiming a physical, or mental, disability has the burden to establish it through the use of competent medical evidence from qualified medical sources such as clinical/laboratory findings, diagnosis/prescribed treatment, prognosis for a recovery and/or medical assessment of ability to do work-related activities, or ability to reason and to make appropriate mental adjustments, if a mental disability is being alleged. 20 CFR 416.913. A conclusory statement by a physician, or mental health professional, that an individual is disabled, or blind, is not sufficient without supporting medical evidence to establish disability...20 CFR 416.927.

The fourth step of the analysis to be considered is whether the Petitioner has the ability to perform work previously performed by the Petitioner within the past 15 years. The trier of fact must determine whether the impairment(s) presented prevent the Petitioner from doing past relevant work. In the present case, the Petitioner's past employment was as a worker in a chemical plant. Working as a worker in a chemical plant, as described by Petitioner at hearing, would be considered heavy exertional work. The Petitioner's impairments would prevent him from doing past relevant work. This Administrative Law Judge will continue through step 5.

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). See *Felton v DSS* 161 Mich. App 690, 696 (1987).

Once the Petitioner makes it to the final step of the analysis, the Petitioner has already established a prima facie case of disability. *Richardson v Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 732 Fd2 962 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir, 1984).

Moving forward the burden of proof rests with the State to prove by substantial evidence that the Petitioner has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity. After careful review of Petitioner's extensive medical record, and the Administrative Law Judge's personal interaction with Petitioner at the hearing, this Administrative Law Judge finds that Petitioner's exertional and non-exertional impairments render Petitioner unable to engage in a full range of, even sedentary, work activities on a regular and continuing basis. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 11, Section 201.00(h). See Social Security Ruling 83-10; *Wilson v Heckler*, 743 F2d 216 (1986). The Department has failed to provide vocational evidence which establishes that Petitioner has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity and, that given Petitioner's age, education, and work experience, there are significant numbers of jobs in the national economy which the Petitioner could perform despite Petitioner's limitations.

Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge concludes that Petitioner is disabled for purposes of the SDA program as of [REDACTED] 2023. Petitioner's testimony regarding his limitations and ability to sit, stand, walk, lift, and carry is credible and supported by substantial medical evidence, specifically Petitioner's most recent MRI report.

Therefore, Petitioner is found to be disabled.


### **DECISION AND ORDER**

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that Petitioner is medically disabled as of [REDACTED] 2023.

Accordingly, the Department's decision is hereby **REVERSED** and the Department is ORDERED to:

1. Initiate a review of the application for SDA dated [REDACTED] 2023, if not done previously, to determine Petitioner's non-medical eligibility.
2. The Department shall inform Petitioner of the determination in writing. A review of this case shall be set for November 2024.

AM/ml

  
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**Aaron McClintic**  
Administrative Law Judge

**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

**Via Electronic Mail:**

**DHHS**  
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**Interested Parties**  
BSC4  
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**Via First Class Mail:**

**Petitioner**  
[REDACTED]  
MI [REDACTED]