



STATE OF WISCONSIN
Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Office of the Inspector General, Petitioner

vs.

██████████, Respondent

DECISION
Case #: FOF - 153931

Pursuant to petition filed December 4, 2013, under Wis. Admin. Code §HA 3.03, and 7 C.F.R. § 273.16, to review a decision by the Office of the Inspector General to disqualify ██████████ from receiving FoodShare benefits (FS) for one year, a hearing was held on Thursday, January 23, 2014 at 02:30 PM, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The issue for determination is whether the respondent committed an Intentional Program Violation (IPV).

There appeared at that time the following persons:

PARTIES IN INTEREST:

Petitioner:

Office of the Inspector General
Department of Health Services - OIG
PO Box 309
Madison, WI 53701

Respondent:

██████████
██████████
██████████

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:

Debra Bursinger
Division of Hearings and Appeals

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The respondent (CARES # ██████████) is a resident of Milwaukee County who received FS benefits in Milwaukee County from June 22, 2010 through October 12, 2010.
2. During that period, the respondent's FS card was used to make purchases at ██████████, a small corner store that has since been disqualified as a FS vendor due to trafficking violations.

3. [REDACTED] was disqualified for three specific bases that are tied to FS trafficking according to the USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS): (1) an unusual number of transactions ending in the same cents value; (2) multiple transactions made by the same purchaser in unusually short time frames; and (3) excessively large purchase transactions (95% of purchases at the store were under \$30 during the relevant time period). The store had one POS device and one cash register making it difficult to ring up large amounts of groceries in a short time period. There was limited counter space and the register is behind a barrier. There were no shopping baskets or carts for customers to place multiple items that would add up to large purchase amounts. The store stocked minimal amounts of food items (very little produce or meat). The store did stock non-food items such as tobacco, liquor, clothing and household products. The owner of [REDACTED] admitted to FNS that he allowed FS card users to purchase diapers on the card.
4. On June 22, 2010, the respondent had the following transactions on her FS card:

9:14 a.m.	\$.70
4:19 p.m.	\$ 9.19 ([REDACTED])
5:09 p.m.	\$ 1.54 ([REDACTED])
6:26 p.m.	\$ 7.50 ([REDACTED])
8:38 p.m.	\$232.17 (Lena's)
8:44 p.m.	\$ 9.60 (Lena's)
5. On August 6, 2010, the respondent had the following transactions at [REDACTED]:

3:53 p.m.	\$10.48
3:54 p.m.	\$ 1.00
3:57 p.m.	\$39.89
6. On September 7, 2010, the respondent had the following transactions at [REDACTED]:

4:15 p.m.	\$ 4.00
6:44 p.m.	\$11.00
6:46 p.m.	\$ 3.85
7. On September 9, 2010, the respondent had the following transactions at [REDACTED]:

4:44 p.m.	\$0.65
4:44 p.m.	\$9.63
8. On October 11, 2010, the respondent had a transaction at [REDACTED] at 10:15 p.m. for \$43.14.
9. On October 12, 2010, the respondent had the following transactions at [REDACTED]:

9:23 p.m.	\$41.00
9:24 p.m.	\$ 5.00
10. On December 19, 2013, the petitioner prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice alleging that respondent trafficked FS benefits at [REDACTED].
11. The respondent failed to appear for the scheduled January 23, 2014 Intentional Program Violation (IPV) hearing and did not provide any good cause for said failure to appear.

DISCUSSION

An intentional program violation of the FoodShare program occurs when a recipient intentionally does the following:

1. makes a false or misleading statement, or misrepresents, conceals or withholds facts;
or
2. commits any act that constitutes a violation of the Food Stamp Act, the Food Stamp Program Regulations, or any Wisconsin statute for the purpose of using, presenting, transferring, acquiring, receiving, possessing or trafficking of FoodShare benefits or QUEST cards.

FoodShare Wisconsin Handbook, § 3.14.1; *see also* 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(c) and Wis. Stat. §§ 49.795(2-7).

An intentional program violation can be proven by a court order, a diversion agreement entered into with the local district attorney, a waiver of a right to a hearing, or an administrative disqualification hearing, *FoodShare Wisconsin Handbook*, § 3.14.1. The petitioner can disqualify only the individual found to have committed the intentional violation; it cannot disqualify the entire household. Those disqualified on grounds involving the improper transfer of FS benefits are ineligible to participate in the FoodShare program for one year for the first violation, two years for the second violation, and permanently for the third violation. Although other family members cannot be disqualified, their monthly allotments will be reduced unless they agree to make restitution within 30 days of the date that the FS program mails a written demand letter. 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(b).

7 C.F.R. §273.16(e)(4) provides that the hearing shall proceed if the respondent cannot be located or fails to appear without good cause. The respondent did not appear or claim a good cause reason for not attending the hearing. Therefore, I must determine whether the respondent committed an IPV based solely on the evidence that the petitioner presented at hearing.

In order for the petitioner to establish that an FS recipient has committed an IPV, it has the burden to prove two separate elements by clear and convincing evidence. The recipient must have: 1) committed; and 2) intended to commit a program violation per 7 C.F.R. § 273.16(e)(6). In *Kuehn v. Kuehn*, 11 Wis.2d 15 (1959), the court held that:

Defined in terms of quantity of proof, reasonable certitude or reasonable certainty in ordinary civil cases may be attained by or be based on a mere or fair preponderance of the evidence. Such certainty need not necessarily exclude the probability that the contrary conclusion may be true. In fraud cases it has been stated the preponderance of the evidence should be clear and satisfactory to indicate or sustain a greater degree of certitude. Such degree of certitude has also been defined as being produced by clear, satisfactory, and convincing evidence. Such evidence, however, need not eliminate a reasonable doubt that the alternative or opposite conclusion may be true. ...

Kuehn, 11 Wis.2d at 26.

Wisconsin Jury Instruction – Civil 205 is also instructive. It provides:

Clear, satisfactory and convincing evidence is evidence which when weighed against that opposed to it clearly has more convincing power. It is evidence which satisfies and convinces you that “yes” should be the answer because of its greater weight and clear convincing power. “Reasonable certainty” means that you are persuaded based upon a rational consideration of the evidence. Absolute certainty is not required, but a guess is not enough to meet the burden of proof. This burden of proof is known as the “middle burden.” The evidence required to meet this burden of proof must be more convincing than merely the greater weight of the credible evidence but may be less than beyond a reasonable doubt.

Further, the *McCormick* treatise states that “it has been persuasively suggested that [the clear and convincing evidence standard of proof] could be more simply and intelligibly translated to the jury if they were instructed that they must be persuaded that the truth of the contention is highly probable.” 2 *McCormick on Evidence* § 340 (John W. Strong gen. ed., 4th ed. 1992).

Thus, in order to find that an IPV was committed, the trier of fact must derive from the evidence, a firm conviction as to the existence of each of the two elements even though there may exist a reasonable doubt that the opposite is true.

In order to prove the second element, i.e., intention, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the FS recipient intended to commit the IPV. The question of intent is generally one to be determined by the trier of fact. *State v. Lossman*, 118 Wis.2d 526 (1984). There is a general rule that a person is presumed to know and intend the probable and natural consequences of his or her own voluntary words or acts. See, *John F. Jelke Co. v. Beck*, 208 Wis. 650 (1932); 31A C.J.S. Evidence §131. Intention is a subjective state of mind to be determined upon all the facts. *Lecus v. American Mut. Ins. Co. of Boston*, 81 Wis.2d 183 (1977). Thus, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the FS recipient knew that the act or omission was a violation of the FS Program but committed the violation anyway.

The Hearing Notice issued to the respondent at her last-known address indicated that the respondent was to contact the Division of Hearings and Appeals with a phone number for the hearing. The respondent did not contact DHA with a phone number and the file otherwise contained no phone number for the respondent.

The agency’s evidence demonstrates that, on the dates that the respondent used her FS card at [REDACTED], some or all of the transactions fit the categories for trafficking. Specifically, on June 22, 2010, the Petitioner made numerous purchases within a short time at [REDACTED] as well as at Lena’s, a large grocery store. The purchases at Angel are questionable given that the respondent clearly had access to a larger store with better prices that day. The respondent’s purchases on August 6, 2010 also demonstrate numerous purchases within a short period of time, including one purchase for \$39.89 and another purchase ending in a cent value of \$.00. In addition two of the purchases were made within one minute of each other. Two of the respondent’s purchases on September 7, 2010 were made within two minutes of each other and two of the purchases were for transactions ending in \$.00. The two transactions on September 9, 2010 were made at 4:44 p.m. The first purchase was for \$.65, the second for \$9.63. It would have been difficult or impossible to ring up \$9.63 of items in less than one minute. The respondent’s purchases on October 11 and 12, 2010 were for large dollar amounts. The purchases on October 12, 2010 were for transactions ending in \$.00.

The agency has presented sufficient evidence to demonstrate that nearly all of the respondent’s purchases at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] made between June, 2010 – October 13, 2010 meet one or more of the categories for trafficking of benefits.

Based upon the record before me, I find that the petitioner has established by clear and convincing evidence that the respondent intentionally violated FS program rules, and that this violation was the first such violation committed by the respondent. Therefore, the petitioner correctly seeks to disqualify the respondent from the FS program for one year.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The respondent violated, and intended to violate, the FS program rule specifying that trafficking FS benefits is prohibited.
2. The violation specified in Conclusion of Law No. 1 is the first such violation committed by the respondent.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is

ORDERED

That the petitioner's determination is sustained, and that the petitioner may make a finding that the respondent committed a first IPV of the FoodShare program and disqualify the respondent from the program for one year, effective the first month following the date of receipt of this decision.

REQUEST FOR A REHEARING ON GROUNDS OF GOOD CAUSE FOR FAILURE TO APPEAR

In instances where the good cause for failure to appear is based upon a showing of non-receipt of the hearing notice, the respondent has 30 days after the date of the written notice of the hearing decision to claim good cause for failure to appear. See 7 C.F.R. sec. 273.16(e)(4).

APPEAL TO COURT

You may also appeal this decision to Circuit Court in the county where you live. Appeals must be served and filed with the appropriate court no more than 30 days after the date of this hearing decision (or 30 days after a denial of rehearing, if you ask for one). Such a claim should be made in writing to the Division of Hearings and Appeals, P.O. Box 7875, Madison, WI 53707-7875.

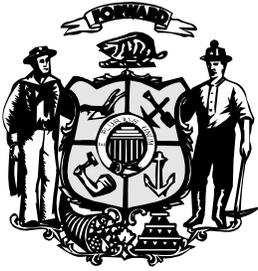
For purposes of appeal to Circuit Court, the Petitioner in this matter is the Department of Health Services. After filing the appeal with the appropriate court, it must be served on the Secretary of that Department, either personally or by certified mail. The address of the Department is: 1 West Wilson Street, Room 651, Madison, WI 53703. A copy should also be sent to the Division of Hearings and Appeals, 5005 University Avenue, Suite 201, Madison, WI 53705-5400.

The appeal must also be served on the other "PARTIES IN INTEREST" named in this decision. The process for appeals to the Circuit Court is in Wis. Stat. §§ 227.52 and 225.53.

Given under my hand at the City of Milwaukee,
Wisconsin, this 20th day of February, 2014

\sDebra Bursinger
Administrative Law Judge
Division of Hearings and Appeals

- c: Office of the Inspector General - email
- Public Assistance Collection Unit - email
- Division of Health Care Access and Accountability - email



State of Wisconsin\DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

Brian Hayes, Administrator
Suite 201
5005 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53705-5400

Telephone: (608) 266-3096
FAX: (608) 264-9885
email: DHAMail@wisconsin.gov
Internet: <http://dha.state.wi.us>

The preceding decision was sent to the following parties on February 20, 2014.

Office of the Inspector General
Public Assistance Collection Unit
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability