



STATE OF WISCONSIN
Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Office of the Inspector General, Petitioner

vs.

DECISION

Case #: FOF - 153934

██████████, Respondent

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 telephonic hearing was held on Wednesday, January 29, 2014 at 01:30 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:

Gary Wolkstein
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 August 12, 2010 through February 13, 2011.

2. The respondent made purchases at [REDACTED] Food Market during the period of August 12, 2010 through February 13, 2011. The Department concluded that respondent was trafficking in FS benefits at [REDACTED] Food for three general, statistical reasons: 1) respondent made unusually large FS purchases with his EBT card considering the size of store, its limited food selections, and the availability of larger stores in the area; 2) respondent made an unusual amount of FS purchases with his EBT card within a short time frame at [REDACTED] Food; and 3) many of respondent's purchases with his EBT card at [REDACTED] Food ended in the same cents value (such as \$00, \$.50 and \$.98) which is unusual and is an indicator of card trafficking.
3. On December 19, 2013, the petitioner prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice alleging respondent trafficked in FoodShare benefits at [REDACTED] Food Market.
4. The respondent failed to appear for the scheduled January 29, 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 Department alleged that it correctly disqualified the respondent’s FS for one year for the reasons set forth in Finding of Fact #2 above. While such general, statistical allegations may be suspicious, it does not nearly rise to the level of proof of clear and convincing proof. One of the Department’s primary arguments is that it was suspicious for respondent to purchase items at ██████ Food on the same day that he made relatively large purchases at another convenience store, ██████. It is true that respondent on November 15, 2010 purchased \$102.34 of food items at ██████ ant then three hours later bought \$50.98 at ██████ Foods. However, maybe, he was preparing a party for friends and realized that more people were coming, or that he had forgotten some food items. If the Department was able to demonstrate a regular pattern of such purchases, then perhaps it would have been a stronger case. However, the next date argued by OIG was December 15, 2010 (one months later) in which respondent purchased \$49.98 at ██████ Food and then purchased \$101.43 at ██████. While such a large purchase at a convenience store may be “unusual” or suspicious, such two examples do not establish the Department’s inference of FS fraud in this case. The other statistical allegations in Finding of Fact #2 are too general and vague to establish a clear evidentiary basis for a finding of fraud.

Based upon the record before me, I find that the petitioner has not 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 incorrectly seeks to disqualify the respondent from the FS program for one year.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Department did not establish by clear and convincing evidence that respondent trafficked in FoodShare benefits at [REDACTED] Food Market.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is ORDERED

That the petitioner’s determination is **reversed**, and that the petitioner shall withdraw any finding that the respondent committed a first IPV of the FoodShare program and shall not sanction the respondent.

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). Such a claim should be made in writing to the Division of Hearings and Appeals, P.O. Box 7875, Madison, WI 53707-7875.

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).

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, no more than 30 days after the date of this hearing decision. 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 Madison,
Wisconsin, this 10th day of March, 2014

\\sGary Wolkstein
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

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The preceding decision was sent to the following parties on March 10, 2014.

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