STATE OF WISCONSIN
Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Milwaukee Enrollment Services, Petitioner

vs.

[redacted], Respondent

DECISION
Case #: FOF - 164259

Pursuant to petition filed February 26, 2015, under Wis. Admin. Code §HA 3.03, and 7 C.F.R. § 273.16, to review a decision by the Milwaukee Enrollment Services to disqualify [redacted] from receiving FoodShare benefits (FS) one year, a hearing was held on Tuesday, April 14, 2015 at 09:45 AM at Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The record was held open post-hearing for 16 days to allow the respondent to provide additional documentation. No additional documentation was provided. The record was closed on April 30, 2015.

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:

Milwaukee Enrollment Services
1220 W Vliet St
Milwaukee, WI 53205

Respondent:
[redacted]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:
Debra Bursinger
Division of Hearings and Appeals

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The respondent (CARES #[redacted]) is a resident of Milwaukee County who received FS benefits in Milwaukee County from August 1, 2013 through December 31, 2014.

2. From May 24, 2013 – December, 2014, the respondent's Wisconsin FS benefits were used primarily in Mississippi.
3. On July 9, 2013, January 5, 2014 and July 25, 2014, the respondent completed ACCESS online renewals reporting that she is a resident of Wisconsin with three children and herself in the household. On July 11, 2013, January 7, 2014 and July 29, 2014, the agency issued Notices of Decision informing the respondent that she would continue to receive FS benefits.

4. On August 7, 2013, the respondent registered to vote in the state of Mississippi using an address of [redacted], [redacted].

5. On September 22, 2014, the respondent's address was updated in the KIDS system to [redacted], [redacted].

6. On November 10, 2014, the case was pended for verification of residence. On November 21, 2014, the case was closed for failure to provide verification. On November 24, 2014, the agency issued a Notice of Decision

7. On March 3, 2015, the petitioner prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice alleging that respondent concealed circumstances that would have affected her FS eligibility.

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. §§ 946.92(2).

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).

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 be a reasonable doubt as to their existence.

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.

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.

The respondent testified that she was in an accident in Mississippi in July, 2013 and was hospitalized for two months. She testified that she was subsequently on bedrest for 7 – 8 months and that she is still under the care of a doctor in Mississippi. She hopes to be released from the doctor's care in June, 2015 and then return to Wisconsin. She testified that she did return to Wisconsin in 2014 approximately four times. The EBT card usage is consistent with her testimony that she returned to Wisconsin for brief periods of time.

The respondent concedes she never told the agency about her situation or reported that she was in Mississippi. She testified that she did speak with workers about her Medicaid claims incurred in Mississippi and that Wisconsin Medicaid approved payment of the claims.

The respondent's two year absence from Wisconsin cannot be considered temporary. When it became apparent that she would be absent from Wisconsin for an extended period of time, it was the responsibility of the respondent to report this change to the agency.

The respondent was asked to provide police reports and medical record documentation to support her claims. She agreed to do so but did not provide any documentation. Therefore, the respondent has failed to successfully rebut

the agency's claim that she committed an intentional program violation and that she intended to commit that violation when she repeatedly failed to report that she has been residing in Mississippi since at least May, 2013.

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 recipients must provide truthful and accurate information.
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). 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 filed with the Court **and** served either personally or by certified mail on the Secretary of the Department of Health Services, 1 West Wilson Street, Room 651, Madison, WI 53703, **and** on those identified in this decision as "PARTIES IN INTEREST" **no more than 30 days after the date of this decision** or 30 days after a denial of a timely rehearing request (if you request one).

The process for Circuit Court Appeals may be found at Wis. Stat. §§ 227.52 and 227.53. A copy of the statutes may be found online or at your local library or courthouse.

Given under my hand at the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this 7th day of May, 2015

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\sDebra Bursinger
Administrative Law Judge
Division of Hearings and Appeals

c:
Miles - email
Public Assistance Collection Unit - email
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability - email
Pamela Hazley - email

State of Wisconsin\DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

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The preceding decision was sent to the following parties on May 7, 2015.

Milwaukee Enrollment Services
Public Assistance Collection Unit
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability
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