STATE OF WISCONSIN
Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Office of the Inspector General, Petitioner

vs.

[redacted], Respondent

DECISION
Case #: FOF - 165389

Pursuant to petition filed April 14, 2015, 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 [redacted] from receiving FoodShare benefits (FS) one year, a hearing was held on Tuesday, June 9, 2015 via telephone.

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: by Nadine Stankey

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

Respondent:
[redacted]

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:
David D. Fleming
Division of Hearings and Appeals

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Respondent (CARES #[redacted]) is a resident of Outagamie County who has an open FoodShare received in Outagamie County and uses the above address for that case.

2. On April 20, 2015, Petitioner prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice alleging that Respondent permitted a non-household member to use his FoodShare benefits on November 10, 2014.

3. Petitioner bases the allegation noted at Finding # 2 on information from a grocery store showing Respondent and another person shopping; Respondent checked out and then the person with him checked out using her store rewards card and Respondent's FoodShare card. That individual is the mother of Respondent's children but they are separate households and she has her own open FoodShare case.
4. Respondent did not appear for the hearing.

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).

Additionally, 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. Respondent did not appear or claim a good cause reason for not attending the hearing. Respondent did not call to provide a number where she could be reached for the hearing. Therefore, I must determine whether the respondent committed an IPV based solely on what the agency 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 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.

The agency Petitioner here contends that Respondent should have known from warnings given during the course of the FoodShare application and/or review process that he could not allow someone else to use his FoodShare. The warnings pointed to by the agency prohibit use of another's benefits (see Exhibit B6 documents - signed by Respondent in April 2009 and March 2010) and informs the applicant that they may be liable for fraudulent use by another (see Exhibit B6, page 4).

This case is not quite as clear cut as the agency contends. Frankly, I think the warnings could be quite a bit clearer. Expecting a person acting in 2014 to remember to read together warnings from 2009 and 2010 may be expecting a bit much. I am, however, struck by the fact that the woman who Respondent allowed to use his card was not part of his household and had her own FoodShare case and do not understand how Respondent would think that government issued benefits were his to give away. That, coupled with an expectation that he should have had some appreciation for restrictions on use based on his applications, does persuade me that Respondent has committed an IPV in this case. The application and review process makes it apparent that FoodShare benefits are issued for a household and that the composition of that household is key. *See, e.g., FSH, §3.3.1.* Indeed, unauthorized use of a FoodShare card can subject a person to Federal felony charges where the use is between $100 and $5000 with a penalty being a fine of up to $10,000 and 4 years in prison. *7 CFR 271.5(b)(1).*

This violation is the first such violation committed by the Respondent. Petitioner may, therefore, disqualify Respondent from the FoodShare program for one year.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. That Respondent violated, and intended to violate, the FoodShare program rules restricting use to household members.
2. That the violation specified in Conclusion of Law No. 1 is the first such violation committed by the Respondent.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is **ORDERED**

That Petitioner may make a finding that Respondent committed a first IPV of the FoodShare program and disqualify 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 14th day of July, 2015

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\sDavid D. Fleming
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
Nadine Stankey - email

State of Wisconsin\DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

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The preceding decision was sent to the following parties on July 14, 2015.

Office of the Inspector General
Public Assistance Collection Unit
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability
NadineE.Stankey@wisconsin.gov