



STATE OF WISCONSIN
Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Office of the Inspector General, Petitioner

vs.

██████████, Respondent

DECISION

Case #: FOF - 168438

Pursuant to petition filed September 3, 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 ██████████ ██████████ from receiving FoodShare benefits (FS) one year, a hearing was held on Wednesday, October 14, 2015 at 11:30 AM in Dodge County, 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:

Mayumi Ishii
Division of Hearings and Appeals

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The respondent (CARES # ██████████) is a resident of Dodge County who received FoodShare benefits.

2. On January 30, 2014, May 19, 2014 and again on March 30, 2015, the county agency sent the Respondent an Eligibility and Benefits Booklet that explains the penalties for trading, buying, or selling benefits, including disqualification from the FoodShare program. (Exhibits 5A and 8)
3. The Respondent did not get FoodShare benefits in January or February 2015. He received FoodShare benefits from March 27, 2015 to July 1, 2015. (Exhibit 3E)
4. On an unspecified date, an individual with the same name as the Respondent posted a message on Facebook that read, "Looking for someone looking for cheap food. I bought way too much food n now it won't all fit in the freezer. 160 worth of food all for 75. Fcfs." (Exhibit 2A)
5. On March 30, 2015, an unnamed individual posted a message on Facebook, "I still have the \$\$ on my card. If you want we can meet up n go shopping." (Exhibit 2A)
6. On September 9, 2015, the Office of the Inspector General prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice, alleging that the Respondent violated the rules of the FoodShare Program on March 30, 2015, by attempting to traffic his Foodshare benefits on Facebook. (Exhibit 7)

DISCUSSION

Respondent's Non-appearance

The Respondent did not appear for this hearing. This circumstance is governed by the regulation in 7 C.F.R. §273.16(e)(4), which states in part:

If the household member or its representative cannot be located or fails to appear at a hearing initiated by the State agency without good cause, the hearing shall be conducted without the household member being represented. *Even though the household member is not represented, the hearing official is required to carefully consider the evidence and determine if intentional Program violation was committed based on clear and convincing evidence.* If the household member is found to have committed an intentional program violation but a hearing official later determines that the household member or representative had good cause for not appearing, the previous decision shall no longer remain valid and the State agency shall conduct a new hearing. The hearing official who originally ruled on the case may conduct a new hearing. In instances where the good cause for failure to appear is based upon a showing of nonreceipt of the hearing notice, the household member has 30 days after the date of the written notice of the hearing decision to claim good cause for failure to appear. In all other instances, *the household member has 10 days from the date of the scheduled hearing to present reasons indicating a good cause for failure to appear. A hearing official must enter the good cause decision into the record.*

Emphasis added

The hearing in this case took place on October 14, 2015. The Respondent was advised of the date and time of the hearing, in an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice that was sent to him at an address on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. Mr. Rinka indicated that the notice was sent to the Respondent's last known address and that the agency did not receive returned mail from this address.

Mr. Rinka noted that OIG also attempted to serve a copy of an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice upon the Respondent at an address in [REDACTED] that the Respondent listed as his actual residence, but that Notice was returned to the agency.

The Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice instructed the Respondent to call the ALJ with a phone number where he could be reached. The Respondent did not provide a phone number. On the date of the hearing, two attempts were made to contact the Respondent at (920) 326-9342, the number listed in the Cares Worker Web. Both times the line was busy. Consequently, the hearing took place without the Respondent.

The Respondent did not contact the Division of Hearings and Appeals within 10 days of the hearing. As such, it is found that the Respondent did not have good cause for his failure to appear.

What is an Intentional Program Violation?

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).

What is OIG's Burden of Proof?

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 it is true.

The Merits of OIG’s Case

This case deals with an allegation of trafficking. Under 7 CFR §271.2, trafficking means:

- (1) The buying, selling, stealing, or otherwise effecting an exchange of SNAP benefits issued and accessed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, card numbers and personal identification numbers (PINs), or by manual voucher and signature, for cash or consideration other than eligible food, either directly, indirectly, in complicity or collusion with others, or acting alone;
- (2) The exchange of firearms, ammunition, explosives, or controlled substances, as defined in section 802 of title 21, United States Code, for SNAP benefits;
- (3) Purchasing a product with SNAP benefits that has a container requiring a return deposit with the intent of obtaining cash by discarding the product and returning the container for the deposit amount;
- (4) Purchasing a product with SNAP benefits with the intent of obtaining cash or consideration other than eligible food by reselling the product, and subsequently intentionally reselling the product purchased with SNAP benefits in exchange for cash or consideration other than eligible food; or
- (5) Intentionally purchasing products originally purchased with SNAP benefits in exchange for cash or consideration other than eligible food.
- (6) Attempting to buy, sell, steal, or otherwise affect an exchange of SNAP benefits issued and accessed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, card numbers and personal identification numbers (PINs), or by manual voucher and signatures, for cash or consideration other than eligible food, either directly, indirectly, in complicity or collusion with others, or acting alone.

This definition became effective November 19, 2013.¹ The previous definition of trafficking did not include attempted trafficking.

More specifically, OIG alleges that the Respondent attempted to traffic FoodShare benefits on March 30, 2015, based upon two Facebook posts:

1. “Looking for someone looking for cheap food. I bought way too much food n now it won’t all fit in the freezer. 160 worth of food all for 75. Fcfs.”
2. “I still have the \$\$ on my card. If you want we can meet up n go shopping.”

With regard to the first post which is copied in Exhibit 2A, there is nothing showing the date on which that post was made. OIG chose not to call their informant as a witness, so there is no evidence to prove when that post was made.

Further, OIG has not provided any concrete evidence to prove the individual who made the first post and the Respondent are one and the same person. OIG attempts to argue that because the Respondent’s EBT usage shows he had a balance of \$156.85 on March 28, 2015, that that somehow proves, by clear and convincing evidence, that the Facebook Poster and Respondent are one in the same individual. The logic in that is faulty. The person in the first post is offering to sell \$160.00 worth of food. By March 30, 2015, the Respondent has purchased \$81.54 in food. (See Exhibit 3C)

It should be noted that the Respondent did not received Foodshare benefits in January or February 2015, and there is no date on that first post, as such there is no way to know whether the food for sale was actually purchased with FoodShare benefits.

OIG might argue that the first post was a veiled pitch to sell the EBT benefits and not food purchased with EBT benefits. However, there is insufficient evidence to substantiate that and a veiled pitch does not satisfy a “clear and convincing evidence” standard of proof.

With regard to the second post, there is no name associated with it. There is a picture of an individual with a child on his shoulders, but no one who could identify the individual in the photos testified at the hearing. The same photo is in the Facebook profile of the individual who created the first post, but again there is no clear indication of who the person in the photo is.

Based upon the foregoing OIG has not proven, by clear and convincing evidence, that the Respondent created the posts in question.

Even assuming arguendo that the Respondent created the posts on March 30, 2015, as alleged, there is still insufficient evidence of attempted trafficking.

The Federal Registrar addressing the amendment to the trafficking definition indicates that “attempt” consists of the “intent to do an act, an overt action beyond mere preparation, and the failure to complete the act.” Fed. Register Vol. 79, No. 162, pg. 51655² This is consistent with the standards for establishing attempt promulgated by the Wisconsin legislature, the Wisconsin courts and the Federal courts.

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/08/21/2013-20245/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-trafficking-controls-and-fraud-investigations>

² See <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/08/21/2013-20245/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-trafficking-controls-and-fraud-investigations#h-13>

Wis. Stats. §939.32(3) states that, “An attempt to commit a crime requires that the actor have an intent to perform acts and attain a result which, if accomplished, would constitute such crime and that the actor does acts toward the commission of the crime which demonstrate unequivocally, under all the circumstances, that the actor formed that intent and would commit the crime except for the intervention of another person or some other extraneous factor.”

The Wisconsin Court of Appeals in State v. Henthorn, 281 Wis.2d 526, 518 N.W.2d 544 (Wis. App. 1998) restated the holding by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in Hamiel v. State, 92 Wis.2d 656, 666, 285 N.W.2d, that, “[I]t must ... be shown that: (1) the defendant's actions in furtherance of the crime clearly demonstrate, under the circumstances that he [or she] had the requisite intent to commit the crime ...; and (2) that having formed such intent the defendant had taken sufficient steps in furtherance of the crime so that it was improbable that he [or she] would have voluntarily terminated his [or her] participation in the commission of the crime.”

The Federal Courts have dealt with establishing standards for determining when one has attempted to violate the law, as follows:

“As was true at common law, the mere intent to violate a federal criminal statute is not punishable as an attempt unless it is also accompanied by significant conduct...Not only does the word ‘attempt’ as used in common parlance connote action rather than mere intent, but more importantly, as used in the law for centuries, it encompasses both the overt act and intent elements.” U.S. v. Resendiz-Ponce, 549 U.S.102, 127 S.Ct. 782, 107 (2007)

The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals³ in U.S. v. Sanchez, 615 F.3d 836, 843 and 844 (7th Cir. 2010) followed this standard, stating that one must not only show an intent to violate the law, but also that the defendant took a substantial step toward completing the crime. The Court of Appeals further stated that, “a substantial step is ‘some overt act adapted to, approximating, and which in the ordinary and likely course of things will result in, the commission of the particular crime’ ...and that it is ‘something more than mere preparation, but less than the last act necessary before the actual commission of the substantive crime’ ...The line between mere preparation is inherently fact specific; conduct that would appear to mere preparation in one case might qualify as a substantial step in another.”⁴

Even if the Respondent created the two posts in question, it is difficult to conclude that creating the two posts constitutes an overt act in furtherance of an intent to traffic benefits. Again, there is little concrete evidence that the food referred to in the first post was even purchased with FoodShare benefits, since we don’t know when the first post was made, nor when the food offered for sale was purchased. Second, there is no evidence that the posts were anything more than an inquiry to see if it would be worth selling benefits. There is no evidence that he set up a specific date, time and location to complete the transaction; there is no evidence that he drove out to a particular store to complete the transaction. Anything could have happened after the post, including the Respondent forgetting about the matter altogether.

OIG attempts to argue that by accessing an electronic device, creating a Facebook profile and accessing the profile that the Respondent engaged in an overt act in furtherance of an intent to traffic benefits. That might be true, if the Respondent purchased the electronic device and created the Facebook profile, exclusively for the

³ Wisconsin is in the 7th Federal Judicial Circuit and as such, holdings from the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals are binding.

⁴ The Court of Appeals cited to *United States v. Manley*, 632 F.2d 978, 988 (2d Cir. 1980), *United States v. Rovetuso*, 768 F.2d 809, 821 (7th Cir.1985), *United States v. Barnes*, 230 F.3d 311, 315 (7th Cir.2000) and *United States v. Magana*, 118 F.3d 1173, 1199 (7th Cir.1997).

purpose of trafficking benefits, but there is no evidence, what-so-ever, that this was the case. Posting an inquiry on Facebook isn't much different than sticking one's head out the front door and shouting out a question.

Based upon the record before me, I find that that OIG has not met its burden to prove, by clear and convincing evidence, that the Respondent intentionally violated the FoodShare program rules by attempting to traffic his benefits on Facebook.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

OIG has not met its burden to prove, by clear and convincing evidence, that the Respondent intentionally violated the FoodShare program rules by attempting to traffic his benefits on Facebook.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is ORDERED

IPV Case Number [REDACTED] is hereby reversed.

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 11th day of November, 2015

\\sMayumi Ishii
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
- Kevin Rinka - 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 November 11, 2015.

Office of the Inspector General
Public Assistance Collection Unit
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability
kevin.rinka@dhs.wisconsin.gov