



STATE OF WISCONSIN

Division of Hearings and Appeals

In the Matter of

Marathon County Dept. of Social Services, Petitioner

vs.

██████████, Respondent

DECISION

Case #: FOF - 206840

Pursuant to a petition filed November 14, 2022, under 7 C.F.R. §273.16, to review a decision by the Marathon County Dept. of Social Services to disqualify ██████████ from receiving FoodShare benefits (FS) for a period of one year, a hearing was held on January 4, 2023, by telephone.

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

PARTIES IN INTEREST:

Petitioner:

Marathon County Dept. of Social Services
400 E. Thomas Street
Wausau, WI 54403
By: Mary Brock

Respondent:

██████████ (Did not appear)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:

Brian C. Schneider
Division of Hearings and Appeals

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The respondent (CARES # ██████████) is a resident of Portage County who received FS benefits in 2022. Marathon County DSS handles Portage County cases as part of the IM Central Consortium.
2. In 2022 the respondent received FS as the case head of a four-person household. On March 18, 2022, she completed a renewal, and she reported working at ██████████ 72 hours weekly at \$19.50 per hour. She provided copies of two paystubs dated March 11 and March 25, 2022 to verify her income. FS were continued for the next month based upon the income reported.

3. The paystubs were altered by the respondent. A worker later noticed that the two paystubs had the same year-to-date income figures, so she contacted the employer to get actual income. The respondent's actual wages were approximately \$600 more than she reported and that were shown on the altered paystubs. The worker also discovered that the respondent had been working at the job since December, 2021, and that she failed to report the income timely. Had she reported correct income timely FS would have been discontinued February 1, 2022 for being over the income limit.
4. On November 14, 2022, the petitioner prepared an Administrative Disqualification Hearing Notice alleging that the respondent falsified her income. The respondent has no prior IPV findings.
5. The respondent failed to appear for the scheduled January 4, 2023 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., §§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 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.

To establish that an FS recipient has committed an IPV, the petitioner 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).

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.

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. A recipient is required to provide correct and truthful information in all applications and renewals. See 7 C.F.R. §273.2(b)(1)(i). Wis. Stat., §946.92(2)(a) provides that it is a violation of the FS program to make false or misleading statements to program officials. Since FS eligibility and allotments are based upon household income and expenses, it is vital to the program that income be reported accurately. See 7 C.F.R. §273.9. Here the respondent not only reported income falsely, she took the next step and filed altered paystubs for verification. The intent is evident. 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 income and expenses must be reported accurately under 7 C.F.R. §273.9.
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).

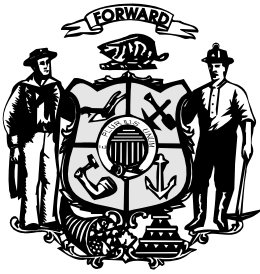
The process for Circuit Court Appeals may be found at Wis. Stat. §§ 227.52 and 227.53. A copy of the statutes may be found online or at your local library or courthouse.

Given under my hand at the City of Madison,
Wisconsin, this 13th day of January, 2023



\sBrian C. Schneider
Administrative Law Judge
Division of Hearings and Appeals

- c: Central Consortium - email
- Public Assistance Collection Unit - email
- Division of Health Care Access and Accountability - email
- Mary Brock - email



State of Wisconsin\DIVISION OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS

Brian Hayes, Administrator
5th Floor North
4822 Madison Yards Way
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 January 13, 2023.

Marathon County Department of Social Services
Public Assistance Collection Unit
Division of Health Care Access and Accountability

