



April 23, 2024

[REDACTED]

Re: [REDACTED] v WV DoHS
ACTION NO.: 24-BOR-1718

Dear [REDACTED]:

Enclosed is a copy of the decision resulting from the hearing held in the above-referenced matter.

In arriving at a decision, the State Hearing Officer is governed by the Public Welfare Laws of West Virginia and the rules and regulations established by the Department of Human Services. These same laws and regulations are used in all cases to assure that all persons are treated alike.

You will find attached an explanation of possible actions you may take if you disagree with the decision reached in this matter.

Sincerely,

Angela D. Signore
State Hearing Officer
Member, State Board of Review

Encl: Recourse to Hearing Decision
Form IG-BR-29

cc: Rebecca Skeens, WV DoHS, [REDACTED]

BEFORE THE WEST VIRGINIA OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
BOARD OF REVIEW

IN THE MATTER OF:

██████████

Appellant,

v.

ACTION NO.: 24-BOR-1718

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN SERVICES BUREAU FOR
FAMILY ASSISTANCE,

Respondent.

DECISION OF STATE HEARING OFFICER

INTRODUCTION

This is the decision of the State Hearing Officer resulting from a fair hearing for ██████████. This hearing was held in accordance with the provisions found in Chapter 700 of the Office of Inspector General Common Chapters Manual. This fair hearing was convened on April 09, 2024, on an appeal filed March 14, 2024.

The matter before the Hearing Officer arises from the February 01, 2024 determination by the Respondent to apply a three (3) month sanction, thereby, terminating the Appellant's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

At the hearing, the Respondent appeared by Rebecca Skeens, Department of Human Services (DoHS). The Appellant appeared *pro se*. All witnesses were sworn and the following documents were admitted into evidence.

Department's Exhibits:

- D-1 WV DoHS Notice of SNAP Work Rules, dated January 02, 2024
- D-2 West Virginia (WV) People's Access to Help (PATH) eligibility system printout of Case Comments, dated September 12, 2023 through January 31, 2024
- D-3 WV DoHS Notice of Decision, dated February 01, 2024; and WV DoHS Notice of SNAP Work Requirement Penalty, dated February 01, 2024
- D-4 WV PATH eligibility system printout of SNAP Work Requirement Penalty Request
- D-5 WV PATH eligibility system printout of WorkForce WV Registration

- D-6 WV PATH eligibility system printout of Case Comments, dated February 02, 2024 through March 15, 2024
- D-7 West Virginia Income Maintenance Manual (WVIMM) §§ 14.3 through 14.3.1.A
- D-8 WVIMM § 14.3.1.B

Appellant's Exhibits:

None

After a review of the record, including testimony, exhibits, and stipulations admitted into evidence at the hearing, and after assessing the credibility of all witnesses and weighing the evidence in consideration of the same, the Hearing Officer sets forth the following Findings of Fact.

FINDINGS OF FACT

- 1) The Appellant was a recipient of SNAP benefits for a one (1) person Assistance Group (AG). (Exhibits D-1 through D-6)
- 2) On January 02, 2024, the Respondent issued notice of decision to the Appellant informing her that she was required to register with WorkForce West Virginia (WorkForce) (WV) and notify the DoHS once registration was completed. The notice indicated her registration deadline was January 30, 2024. (Exhibit D-1)
- 3) The Appellant failed to register with WorkForce or meet an exemption prior to the January 30, 2024 deadline. (Exhibits D-2 through D-4)
- 4) On February 01, 2024, the Respondent issued two additional notices informing the Appellant that effective March 01, 2024, a SNAP work requirement penalty would be applied to her benefits for failure to register with WorkForce WV. The notices informed her that she would remain ineligible for SNAP benefits for a period of three (3) months or until she complied with the registration requirement, whichever was longer. (Exhibit D-3)
- 5) On March 01, 2024, the Appellant's SNAP benefits were terminated due to her failure to register with WorkForce or meet an exemption prior to the established deadline. (Exhibits D-3 through D-6)
- 6) The Appellant contested the Respondent's decision and on March 14, 2024, requested a Fair Hearing. (Exhibit D-6)
- 7) This is the Appellant's first violation of the SNAP work requirement. (Exhibits D-4 through D-6)

APPLICABLE POLICY

The Code of Federal Regulations, 7 CFR § 273.7, provides, in part:

(a) Work requirements

(1) As a condition of eligibility for SNAP benefits, each household member not exempt under paragraph (b)(1) of this section must comply with the following SNAP work requirements:

(i) Register for work or be registered by the State agency at the time of application and every 12 months after initial registration. The member required to register need not complete the registration form.

(ii) Participate in a Food Stamp Employment and Training (E&T) program if assigned by the State agency, to the extent required by the State agency;

(iii) Participate in a workfare program if assigned by the State agency;

(iv) Provide the State agency or its designee with sufficient information regarding employment status or availability for work;

(v) Report to an employer to whom referred by the State agency or its designee if the potential employment meets the suitability requirements described in paragraph (h) of this section;

(vi) Accept a bona fide offer of suitable employment, as defined in paragraph (h) of this section, at a site or plant not subject to a strike or lockout, at a wage equal to the higher of the Federal or State minimum wage or 80 percent of the wage that would have governed had the minimum hourly rate under section 6(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act been applicable to the offer of employment.

(vii) Do not voluntarily and without good cause quit a job of 30 or more hours a week or reduce work effort to less than 30 hours a week, in accordance with paragraph (j) of this section.

(3) Each State agency will determine the meaning of any other terms used in paragraph (a)(1) of this section; the procedures for establishing compliance with SNAP work requirements; and whether an individual is complying with SNAP work requirements. A State agency must not use a meaning, procedure, or determination that is less restrictive on SNAP recipients than is a comparable meaning, procedure, or determination under the State agency's program funded under title IV-A of the Social Security Act.

(b) Exemptions from work requirements

(1) The following persons are exempt from SNAP work requirements:

(ii) A person physically or mentally unfit for employment. For the purposes of this paragraph (b), a State agency will define physical and mental fitness; establish procedures for verifying; and will verify claimed physical or mental unfitness when necessary. However, the State agency must not use a definition, procedure for verification, or verification that is less restrictive on SNAP recipients than a comparable meaning, procedure, or determination under the State agency's program funded under title IV-A of the Social Security Act.

(iii) A person subject to and complying with any work requirement under title IV of the Social Security Act. If the exemption claimed is questionable, the State agency is responsible for verifying the exemption.

(c) State agency responsibilities

(1) State agency responsibilities

(i) The State agency must register for work each household member not exempted by the provisions of paragraph (b)(1) of this section. The State agency must permit the applicant to complete a record or form for each household member required to register for employment in accordance with paragraph (a)(1)(i) of this section. Household members are considered to have registered when an identifiable work registration form is submitted to the State agency or when the registration is otherwise annotated or recorded by the State agency.

(ii) During the certification process, the State agency must provide a written notice and oral explanation to the household of all applicable work requirements for all members of the household, and identify which household member is subject to which work requirement. These work requirements include the general work requirement in paragraph (a) of this section, mandatory E&T in paragraph (a)(1)(ii) of this section, and the ABAWD work requirement at § 273.24. The written notice and oral explanation must be provided in accordance with (c)(1)(iii) of this section. This written notice and oral explanation must also be provided to the household when a previously exempt household member or new household member becomes subject to these work requirements, and at recertification.

(iii) The consolidated written notice must include all pertinent information related to each of the applicable work requirements, including: An explanation of each applicable work requirement; which individuals are subject to which work requirement; exemptions from each applicable work requirement; an explanation of the process to request an exemption (including contact information to request an exemption); the rights and responsibilities of each applicable work requirement; what is required to maintain eligibility under each applicable work requirement; pertinent dates by which an individual must take any actions to remain in compliance with each applicable work requirement; the consequences for failure to comply with each applicable work requirement; an explanation of the process for requesting good cause (including examples of good cause circumstances and contact information to initiate a good cause request); and any other information the State agency believes would assist the household members with compliance.

(f) Failure to comply

(2) **Disqualification periods.** The following disqualification periods will be imposed:

(i) For the first occurrence of noncompliance, the individual will be disqualified until the later of:

(A) The date the individual complies, as determined by the State agency;

(B) One month; or

(C) Up to three months, at State agency option.

(ii) For the second occurrence, until the later of:

- (A) The date the individual complies, as determined by the State agency;
- (B) Three months; or
- (C) Up to six months, at State agency option.

(iii) For the third or subsequent occurrence, until the later of:

- (A) The date the individual complies, as determined by the State agency;
- (B) Six months;
- (C) A date determined by the State agency; or
- (D) At the option of the State agency, permanently.

West Virginia Income Maintenance Manual (WVIMM) § 14.2 General SNAP Work Requirements and Exemptions provides, in part:

All SNAP clients are subject to a work requirement unless exempt.

WVIMM § 14.3.1.A Registration Requirements provides, in part:

All individuals must register for employment with WorkForce West Virginia, within 30 days of the date of the original approval, unless exempt according to Section 14.2. Clients must register every 12 months thereafter, regardless of the length of time that WorkForce West Virginia considers the registration valid.

Actions which constitute a registration are defined by WorkForce West Virginia and the eligibility system must:

- Match with WorkForce West Virginia. Registration date updated.
- Match the date returned from WorkForce West Virginia is more than 12 months old. The client must register again.
- Match with WorkForce West Virginia with inactive job status and no job preference. The client must choose a job preference and become active to be considered registered.
- Match with WorkForce West Virginia with inactive job status and with job preference. The client must become active to be considered registered.
- Match with WorkForce West Virginia with active job status and no job preference. The client must choose a job preference to be considered registered.

Once the client registers with WorkForce West Virginia for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) purposes, he cannot be required to register more often than every 12 months, even when the benefit is opened and closed within the 12-month period. This is tracked through the eligibility system.

The client may register by visiting a WorkForce West Virginia office, or by registering online. The Worker must explain these requirements to the client and enter the registration date in the eligibility system.

A client who fails to comply by the due date established on the notice to register is subject to a SNAP penalty and the worker must send an adverse action notice. The penalty is not imposed, and any lost benefits are restored if, before the end of the month in which adverse notice expires, the following occurs: the client registers with WorkForce WV, the individual notifies the DHHR that he or she has registered. If the worker discovers the registration before the penalty goes into effect that the client has registered before the end of the month which the adverse action expires, the penalty may be lifted, and benefits restored.

WVIMM § 14.3.1.B WorkForce WV provides, in part:

During the application and redetermination process, the eligibility system will present a registration date obtained from WorkForce WV. If the client is not registered, no date will be returned. During the certification period, the worker may request the registration date through the eligibility system. When the client is due to re-register, he must show activity to fulfill this requirement. The date of the re-registration is the date of the last action with WorkForce WV or the due date of the re-registration, whichever is later.

WVIMM § 14.5 SNAP Work Requirement Penalties provides, in part:

A SNAP penalty is imposed when clients do not comply with a work requirement and do not have good cause. When determining the correct number of penalties, the Worker must look at the total number of penalties previously served, not just the number of penalties for each work requirement.

The penalty must be served unless the client meets an exemption. The penalty is never applied to an entire AG, only to the client who does not comply. When the reported exemption ends, the client is subject to the original penalty, unless he has complied or meets another exemption.

WVIMM § 14.5.1.B Non-Voluntary Quit Penalties provides, in part:

An individual who refuses or fails to register with WorkForce WV is subject to the following penalties for the full penalty period or until he or she reports a change which makes him or her exempt from the work requirements. For a first violation, the individual is removed from the SNAP AG for at least three (3) months or until he meets an exemption, whichever is later.

DISCUSSION

The Respondent bears the burden of proof to establish that action taken against the Appellant was in accordance with policy. The Respondent had to prove by a preponderance of evidence that the Appellant's SNAP benefits were correctly terminated, and a first sanction applied based on the

Appellant's non-compliance with the WorkForce registration requirement.

By notice of decision dated January 02, 2024, the Respondent informed the Appellant that she was required to register with WorkForce or meet an exemption by January 30, 2024, in order to comply with SNAP policy. On February 01, 2024, when the Appellant failed to register with WorkForce or meet an exemption, the Respondent issued two additional notices. The notices informed the Appellant that due to her failure to register with WorkForce or meet an exemption, a work requirement penalty had been applied and the Appellant's SNAP benefits would terminate effective March 01, 2024. The decision notified the Appellant that she would remain ineligible for SNAP benefits for a period of three (3) months or until she complied with the registration requirement or met an exemption, whichever was longer.

The Appellant provided unconvincing testimony that when she attempted to register for WorkForce via both the online portal and telephone, she had difficulty completing her registration. The Appellant testified that she was not able to complete registration due to internet complications within the WorkForce registration system. She further testified that over the span of "two weeks or even longer;" she was continually receiving an error that prohibited her from successfully completing her registration obligation. The Respondent testified that in the event of a WorkForce registration outage, the Department is made aware of any issues that clients may experience. The Respondent further testified that the Department was not advised of any WorkForce registration system outages down during the time period in question. Additionally, the Respondent argued that the Appellant is the only person who has reported any problems with the registration system. The Appellant testified that over the span of "several weeks," she had spoken with multiple people at WorkForce regarding her inability to register, though she inexplicably failed to report the registration difficulties to the Department.

Pursuant to policy section 14.3, an individual must register with WorkForce by visiting a WorkForce office, by registering online, or over the phone, yearly, as a condition of eligibility to receive SNAP benefits, unless an exemption is met. If an individual fails to register with WorkForce by the due date listed on the registration request letter, but registration is completed prior to the effective date of the SNAP penalty and the Respondent is notified of the registration, the penalty may be removed. Since no testimony was provided by either party that the Appellant met an exemption, the Appellant was required to register with WorkForce yearly in order to comply with SNAP policy. Because the Appellant's testimony was unconvincing, and more importantly, because the Appellant neglected to contact the Department regarding any registration barrier she was experiencing until after the penalty was imposed, the Respondent acted in accordance with the policy. Because this is the Appellant's first work requirement penalty, she would remain ineligible for SNAP benefits for a period of three (3) months or until she complies with the SNAP work requirement (or meets an exemption), whichever was longer.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

- 1) Pursuant to policy, the Appellant was required to comply with SNAP work requirements by either registering with WorkForce or meeting an exemption no later than January 30, 2024.

- 2) Because the Appellant failed to register with WorkForce or meet an exemption for SNAP purposes by the established January 30, 2024 deadline, a first penalty must be applied to the Appellant's SNAP benefits.
- 3) Because this is the Appellant's first violation of the work requirement, policy requires she be excluded from participation in SNAP for a period of three (3) months.

DECISION

It is the decision of the State Hearing Officer to **UPHOLD** the Respondent's decision to impose a SNAP work requirement penalty for a period of three (3) months effective March 01, 2024.

ENTERED this 23rd day of April 2024.

Angela D. Signore
State Hearing Officer