

IN THE EXECUTIVE ETHICS COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

In re: LAJANICE SANDERSON) OEIG Case # 11-00189

OEIG FINAL REPORT (REDACTED)

Below is a final summary report from an Executive Inspector General. The General Assembly has directed the Executive Ethics Commission (Commission) to redact information from this report that may reveal the identity of witnesses, complainants or informants and “any other information it believes should not be made public.” 5 ILCS 430/20-52(b).

The Commission exercises this responsibility with great caution and with the goal of balancing the sometimes competing interests of increasing transparency and operating with fairness to the accused. In order to balance these interests, the Commission may redact certain information contained in this report. The redactions are made with the understanding that the subject or subjects of the investigation have had no opportunity to rebut the report’s factual allegations or legal conclusions before the Commission.

The Commission received a final report from the Governor’s Office of Executive Inspector General (“OEIG”) and a response from the agency in this matter. The Commission, pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52, redacted the final report and mailed copies of the redacted version and responses to the Attorney General, the Governor’s Executive Inspector General and to LaJanice Sanderson at her last known address.

The Commission reviewed all suggestions received and makes this document available pursuant to 5 ILCS 430/20-52.

FINAL REPORT

I. Allegations

The Office of Executive Inspector General (OEIG) received a complaint alleging that Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson was awarding and modifying benefits for her children, [child 1] and [child 2], in violation of DHS policy. The OEIG concludes that these allegations are **FOUNDED**. The OEIG also finds that Ms. Sanderson violated the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act (Ethics Act) by not cooperating with the OEIG during the course of the investigation.

II. Background

A. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federally funded program that assists low-income households to purchase food. DHS administers the program on behalf of

the federal government. As part of its responsibilities, DHS is required to determine client eligibility, calculate the amount of benefits a client receives, and distribute benefits. In calculating benefits, DHS considers the number of persons in an applicant's household, any income (wages and other sources of income) and certain expenses, including rent and utility payments.

For purposes of the SNAP food stamp program, a "household" is typically an individual or a group of people who live together and buy food and prepare meals together to eat at home. Members of a SNAP food stamp household get their benefits together, on one LINK card,¹ and their income is counted as a group in determining eligibility. Household members do not have to be related to each other.

People who live together, but buy and prepare food separately, are considered separate SNAP food stamp households. Each household would receive its respective benefits on a separate LINK card. This means that more than two SNAP food stamp households can share a residence and receive separate and distinct benefits. Furthermore, as long as a SNAP food stamp household is purchasing and preparing its food separately, that household could share a residence with a person not receiving SNAP benefits without that individual person's income being considered in the receipt of SNAP benefits.

B. LaJanice Sanderson's Employment with DHS

LaJanice Sanderson is a DHS caseworker at the DHS Family Community Resource Center in Rock Island (Local Office). Part of Ms. Sanderson's job responsibilities includes determining clients' eligibility for SNAP benefits. Ms. Sanderson is required to collect and input clients' information about their respective households, income and expenses. Ms. Sanderson is required to consider all relevant information in calculating whether clients receive SNAP benefits. If clients are eligible, the information Ms. Sanderson enters into the DHS computer system is used to calculate the amount of benefits a client receives.

DHS caseworkers input all relevant data into DHS's Resource Access Control Facility (RACF) computer system. In accessing RACF, caseworkers are assigned a unique user identification number and their respective computers are assigned a terminal identification number. Ms. Sanderson's user identification number is [redacted] and her computer's terminal identification number is [redacted]. Ms. Sanderson's identification number for her case load is [redacted].

C. LaJanice Sanderson's Children

Ms. Sanderson has two children. One of her children is [child 1] and the other one is [child 2].

¹ LINK cards are plastic cards that function similar to debit cards.

D. DHS Employee Personal Conduct

DHS maintains numerous policies and procedures regarding the awarding of SNAP benefits and the conduct of its employees. Specifically, all DHS employees must comply with the policies contained in DHS's Employee Handbook, which include the following provisions:

- Section V, "Employee Personal Conduct," states, "[a]n employee may not authorize assistance, benefits, or services to relatives. . . . Further, an employee may not be directly involved in deciding or redetermining eligibility for DHS services for relatives or household members. . . ."
- Section V, "Performance of Duties," requires DHS employees to follow DHS rules and regulations in the performance of their duties.

E. Ms. Sanderson's Acknowledgment of DHS Employee Handbook

On May 17, 2000, Ms. Sanderson signed an acknowledgement that she received the DHS Employee Handbook. Ms. Sanderson's signature on the acknowledgement reflected her agreement that she understood and agreed to comply with all policies and regulations in the DHS Employee Handbook.² By signing this form, Ms. Sanderson further acknowledged that any violation of DHS policy or regulation could result in disciplinary action, including discharge.

III. Investigation

A. Initial Interview of [employee 1]

On February 25, 2011, investigators interviewed [employee 1]. According to [employee 1], in response to receiving a complaint about Ms. Sanderson authorizing benefits for her [child 1], [employee 1] initiated a review of [child 1's] file for any actions that Ms. Sanderson may have taken that would affect [child 1's] receipt of benefits. The review revealed that:

- In approximately June 2010, Ms. Sanderson began working on [child 1's] DHS file.
- On June 17, 2010, Ms. Sanderson recertified [child 1's] application for SNAP benefits, thereby allowing her to continue receiving benefits.
- In August 2010, Ms. Sanderson changed [child 1's] mailing address. This change had no effect on [child 1's] receipt of benefits.
- On October 5, 2010, Ms. Sanderson inserted verification of mortgage and tax expenses into [child 1's] DHS file, which increased her benefits.
- On December 13, 2010, Ms. Sanderson recertified [child 1's] application for SNAP benefits for a second time.

[Employee 1] was able to verify that Ms. Sanderson took these actions because the case notes listing these actions were accompanied by Ms. Sanderson's electronic signature, *i.e.*, her name

² The OEIG notes that Ms. Sanderson signed the form on May 17, 2000 as "LaJanice Lickfelt." Lickfelt was Ms. Sanderson's last name prior to her changing it on February 13, 2001.

was typed along with these entries. Furthermore, according to [employee 1], the system showed that these changes were made using Ms. Sanderson's computer.

[Employee 1] said that [child 1's] file was assigned to Ms. Sanderson via the alphabetical assignment system. [Employee 1] said that after finding out in January 2011 that Ms. Sanderson worked on her daughter's file, [child 1's] case was reassigned to a different caseworker.

[Employee 1] told investigators that she also reviewed [child 2's] (Ms. Sanderson's [child]) case file. The review revealed that:

- On March 2, 2009, Ms. Sanderson entered [child 2's] initial application for SNAP benefits.
- In April 2009, Ms. Sanderson amended [child 2's] application to include his wife as part of the SNAP unit.

According to [employee 1], Ms. Sanderson was initially able to access [child 2's] application because she was the caseworker opening the file. [Employee 1] said that, after a new application is processed, the Local Office used an alphabetical assignment system to assign clients to caseworkers. [Employee 1] said that, after Ms. Sanderson opened [child 2's] file, it was assigned to another caseworker, [employee 2]. [Child 2's] file was closed on January 18, 2011.

[Employee 1] said that she believed it was against DHS policy for caseworkers to issue benefits to family members. [Employee 1] also said that, after receiving both [child 1's] and [child 2's] files, Ms. Sanderson should have reported it to her supervisor, but never did.

B. DHS's Initial Audit of [child 1's] and [child 2's] Case Files

On May 12, 2011, investigators received a copy of DHS's audit of [child 1's] case file. The audit was performed by a DHS Field Consultant and it revealed that [child 1] received SNAP overpayments of approximately \$14,025 from August 2009 through May 2011. The overpayments were attributable to:

- [Child 1's] husband not being listed as a member of the household in her application and therefore his income was not considered in calculating [child 1's] benefits;
- [Child 1's] unemployment benefits from Ohio not being included in the calculation of benefits;
- [Child 1's] file containing an improper deduction for expenses relating to her ownership of a home in Ohio.

An audit of [child 2's] file showed no overpayments.

C. Interview of DHS Field Consultant

On May 24, 2011, an investigator interviewed the DHS Field Consultant who had reviewed and audited [child 1's] file. Investigators confirmed that [child 1] had received an

overpayment of approximately \$14,025 from August 2009 through May 2011. The consultant confirmed that the overpayment occurred for the reasons listed in her audit, which she previously provided to the OEIG.

With respect to [child 1's] husband living with her while she received SNAP benefits, the consultant said that she was able to confirm that [the husband] and [child 1] shared a residence as far back as August 2009 and as recently as March 2011. The address that the consultant verified was [redacted], which is Ms. Sanderson's address.³

While the audit was being performed, [child 1] sent DHS a letter stating that her husband had only lived with her for two months and that she had reported this to DHS. There was no record of this information in [child 1's] DHS file.

Investigators were informed that when DHS determines there has been an overpayment, it seeks reimbursement from the client, regardless of the reasons why the overpayments occurred.

D. Initial Interview of DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson

On July 1, 2011, investigators interviewed Ms. Sanderson. At the outset of the interview, OEIG investigators presented Ms. Sanderson with an Administrative Rights Form. This form states, in relevant part, the person being interviewed is obligated to cooperate with the OEIG's investigation and that he/she understood:

that any false, inaccurate, or deliberately incomplete statements by me, or my refusal to answer, could result in disciplinary action up to and including discharge. I understand that any statement made by me in the course of this interview could be used as the basis for disciplinary action up to and including discharge.

Ms. Sanderson signed the Administrative Rights Form acknowledging her understanding and obligation to comply with this provision.

Ms. Sanderson told investigators that she had two children, [child 1] and [child 2]. After being shown a DHS Employee Handbook acknowledgment form bearing her signature, Ms. Sanderson confirmed signing the document. Ms. Sanderson also said that, although she had never previously read the provision in the DHS Employee Handbook prohibiting caseworkers from working on a family member's DHS case, she understood that she could not do so because of "ethics policies."

³ According to the DHS Field Consultant, in order for her to verify that an individual resides at a certain address, she needs four sources documenting that address. In this case, she obtained the following: United States Postal Service address verification for [the husband]; property data from Clark County, Ohio for [the husband]; verification from RIA Federal Credit Union; and, vehicle registration information from the Illinois Secretary of State. In each instance, the address listed for [the husband] was [redacted].

When asked by investigators whether, despite this prohibition, she worked on her children's cases, Ms. Sanderson initially only said that both her son [redacted] and daughter [redacted] lived with her while they received benefits. Ms. Sanderson then said that she did not initially handle her daughter's DHS case.

Upon further questioning, Ms. Sanderson said that she did authorize her daughter ([redacted]) to receive SNAP benefits, but that she only did so because her daughter's case was assigned to her pursuant to the Local Office's alphabetical assignment system and she did not initially recognize the file as belonging to her daughter. Ms. Sanderson said that she did not initially recognize that the file belonged to her daughter, because she had another client named "[daughter's name]" on her case load. Ms. Sanderson said that when she started initially working on the file that she thought it was her client, "[client's name]," not her daughter, "[child 1]."⁴ After doing some more work, however, she recognized the file as belonging to her daughter. Ms. Sanderson said that she did not inform her supervisor that she had worked on her daughter's file, but instead immediately gave the file to another caseworker. Ms. Sanderson identified the caseworker as [employee 2].

Investigators showed Ms. Sanderson the first page of notes from [child 1's] file, dated June 17, 2010, that contained a notation showing that she worked on the file. Ms. Sanderson confirmed that this was the day she referenced when she did some work on file, but then gave it to the other caseworker ([employee 2]).

Investigators then showed Ms. Sanderson entries from [child 1's] file for August 31, 2010, October 5, 2010 and December 13, 2010, which all had entries made by her showing that she worked on her daughter's file on those particular days. Ms. Sanderson said that she believed [child 1's] normal caseworker was out of the office on those days and that she must have been assigned to work on some of that caseworker's files, which would have included [child 1's] file. Ms. Sanderson then said that, despite knowing she was not supposed to work on her daughter's file, she did not inform her supervisor about the conflict or ask anyone else to work on the file.

Investigators then asked Ms. Sanderson about her work on [child 2's] file. Ms. Sanderson told investigators that she believed that [child 2] personally gave her his application for benefits, which she brought to the Local Office and then processed. Ms. Sanderson said that she did not falsify any information to make sure he was eligible for benefits and that she did not believe the prohibition from working on family member's cases applied to new benefit applications.

Investigators then showed Ms. Sanderson the case file for [child 2], which had two entries revealing that she had worked on his file. Ms. Sanderson confirmed that she made the entries in [child 2's] file authorizing him to receive SNAP benefits. Ms. Sanderson said that she told her supervisor that her son had applied for benefits, but acknowledged that she did not tell her supervisor that she was working on her son's file. Ms. Sanderson told investigators that she

⁴ The OEIG was aware that Ms. Sanderson had a client named "[daughter's name]" (who was not her daughter) on her case load.

considered switching her son's file to another caseworker, but decided it would be quicker for her to process the file rather than assigning it to another caseworker.

Ms. Sanderson said that all of the information she entered was valid and denied failing to enter information simply to increase her children's benefits. Ms. Sanderson also said that there should be documentation in her daughter's file supporting the deduction for expenses relating to her (child 1's) ownership of a home in Ohio.

E. Second Interview of DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson

On December 8, 2011, investigators re-interviewed DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson. Before starting the interview, investigators again presented Ms. Sanderson with an Administrative Rights Form that was identical to the one given to her prior to her July 1, 2011 interview. This form states, in relevant part, that the person being interviewed is obligated to cooperate with the OEIG's investigation, which includes being truthful in answering questions.

Ms. Sanderson then confirmed that she remembered her July 1, 2011 interview with OEIG investigators and that, "to [her] knowledge," everything she said was truthful. Ms. Sanderson was then shown a DHS Employee Handbook acknowledgment form bearing her signature and a DHS Employee Handbook.

Ms. Sanderson acknowledged that it was her signature on the DHS Employee Handbook acknowledgment form and that she understood that she was obligated to read, understand and follow the policies set forth in the DHS Employee Handbook.

In the course of the interview, Ms. Sanderson acknowledged that she knew she should not have worked on either her daughter's ([child 1's]) or her son's ([child 2's]) DHS files. Ms. Sanderson also told investigators that she knew she should have told her supervisor about working on her daughter's file, but failed to do so.

When asked about bringing in her son's initial SNAP application in March 2009, Ms. Sanderson said that, while she did not have a specific recollection of the event, she did recall bringing in his application. She said that at the time she brought in his application, [child 2] was not living with her, but was living in a residence that he owned. Ms. Sanderson said that [child 2] was living with his then-girlfriend, [redacted], and his son. Investigators showed Ms. Sanderson the entry on [child 2's] file where she processed his application and Ms. Sanderson confirmed it was the application she brought in, and that she made the entry.

Investigators showed Ms. Sanderson an entry in April 2009 on [child 2's] file adding child 2's girlfriend (now [married name]) to [child 2's] case as his wife. Ms. Sanderson said that they were married in approximately April 2009, and that she made the entry adding [child 2's spouse] to [child 2's] file. Investigators then showed Ms. Sanderson "Authorization of Assistance Action" forms from [child 2's] file. One form was dated April 13, 2009 and two forms were dated April 14, 2009. Each form listed a case load number of "[redacted]," which is the case load designation for [employee 3], but noted that "CHANGE MADE BY TERMINAL ID: '[redacted]'."

Investigators confirmed with Ms. Sanderson that her computer's terminal identification number is [redacted] and that the identification number for her case load was [redacted]. When asked why she took the action of adding [child 2's spouse] to [child 2's] file as the file was assigned to another caseworker, *i.e.*, [employee 3], Ms. Sanderson said it was because [employee 3] had left DHS employment. Ms. Sanderson said that work on [employee 3's] cases was being assigned to other caseworkers on a temporary basis pending the permanent reassignment of his cases. Ms. Sanderson said that the file "was assigned to me, so I just did it."

Ms. Sanderson said that, in approximately late May 2009 or early June 2009, her son left the residence he shared with [child 1's spouse] and moved in with her. Ms. Sanderson said that [child 2] and his son lived with her for approximately one year.⁵ Ms. Sanderson confirmed that her son received benefits during the time he lived with her, but said that, during that time, she and [child 2] purchased and prepared their food separately.

Investigators asked Ms. Sanderson about her work on her daughter's file and her statement in her July 1, 2011 interview that her daughter ([child 1]) also lived with her while receiving benefits. In discussing the arrangements surrounding her daughter living with her, Ms. Sanderson said that three of her daughter's children moved in with her in approximately August 2009 and that her daughter and the remaining two children moved in with her in approximately September 2009. Ms. Sanderson told investigators that her daughter and her children moved out of her house prior to Thanksgiving of that year. Ms. Sanderson said that, although her daughter moved out, she failed to update her address and that mail continued to arrive at Ms. Sanderson's home for [child 1].

Ms. Sanderson said that her daughter received benefits during the time she ([child 1]) lived with her. Ms. Sanderson said [child 1's] family also lived at her residence during this time. Ms. Sanderson said that she and [child 1] purchased and prepared food separately. Investigators then asked Ms. Sanderson about the overlap when [child 2] and [child 1] (and their respective families) all were residing at her (Ms. Sanderson's) home. Ms. Sanderson said that each household purchased and prepared food separately.

When asked about whether her prior statements about working on her daughter's case were truthful, Ms. Sanderson said that they were. Ms. Sanderson said that she did not bring in her daughter's application, however, she did bring in documents for her application, *i.e.*, grandchildren's birth certificates, social security cards, and documents relating to [child 1's] housing costs.

With respect to her working on her daughter's redetermination application for benefits, Ms. Sanderson told investigators that, when this occurred in June 2010, she did not initially realize that she was working on her daughter's file. Ms. Sanderson said that this was because the application came into the office through a phone system interview (PSI). In a PSI, Ms. Sanderson explained, the caseworker does not talk directly to a client, but reviews the client's

⁵ Ms. Sanderson said that [child 1's] daughter also resided with them every other weekend.

responses to a telephone interview conducted by an electronic system. The caseworker views the client's responses on his/her computer.

Ms. Sanderson said that, only when processing the final steps of her daughter's application, did she realize the file belonged to her daughter. When investigators pointed out that [child 1's] PSI would have listed her home address, Ms. Sanderson said that she must not have been paying attention. When asked if [child 1's] PSI listed her children's names, Ms. Sanderson said she did not remember.

Ms. Sanderson said that she did not inform her supervisor that she had worked on her daughter's file, but instead immediately gave the file to another caseworker. Ms. Sanderson identified the caseworker as [employee 2] and confirmed that this happened in June 2010. Ms. Sanderson said that, in speaking with [employee 2], she said that she ([employee 2]) would transfer the case to her case load and off of Ms. Sanderson's case load.

Ms. Sanderson said that, despite her efforts, [child 1's] file returned to her case load and she continued to work on it. Ms. Sanderson told investigators that, in December 2010, she knowingly processed her daughter's redetermination application, which is noted in the case notes as a PSI.

When asked by investigators whether she worked on any other family member's or friend's DHS cases, Ms. Sanderson said that she had not. Investigators then showed her case notes for [child 1's girlfriend's] case, which showed that she had received SNAP benefits prior to being married to [child 1] and that Ms. Sanderson's electronic signature accompanied numerous case note entries in [child 1's spouse's] case file from November 2008 through January 2009. Investigators asked Ms. Sanderson how her prior statement could be truthful when it was clear she had worked on [child 1's spouse's] case. Ms. Sanderson said that she did not recall working on the case. After investigators showed her the file and her notations, Ms. Sanderson said that she did indeed work on the file, but that when she was working on the file, she was not aware that she was working on her son's girlfriend's case.

Investigators then pointed out that [child 1's girlfriend's name] was not a common name and happened to also be her son's girlfriend's name. Ms. Sanderson was then shown numerous notations in the file, which she had written, that referenced a boyfriend, *i.e.*, Ms. Sanderson's son. These notations contained personal identifiers associated with her son, *e.g.*, where the son worked, that (as his mother) should have made her aware that she was working on his girlfriend's case. Furthermore, a later notation even notes when "[child 1's] last day to work for" his employer was to occur.

After reviewing these notations, Ms. Sanderson said that she was aware that she was working on her son's girlfriend's case file at the time she made the entries. Ms. Sanderson told investigators that she believed that, given the number of entries that she made, that the case was assigned to her. Ms. Sanderson did not see a problem with her working on the file. Ms. Sanderson also said that she neither socialized nor was friends with [child 2's spouse] so she did not see a problem with working on her case.

F. Interview of [employee 2]

On December 8, 2011, investigators interviewed [employee 2]. In her interview, [employee 2] said that Ms. Sanderson had approached her about working on her (Ms. Sanderson's) daughter's file. [Employee 2] said that she told Ms. Sanderson to switch [child 1's] file to her case load.

[Employee 2] said that she had reviewed and started working on [child 1's] file. [Employee 2] could not recall whether these events occurred in June 2010 or December of 2010. However, [employee 2] was able to tell investigators that shortly after Ms. Sanderson transferred [child 1's] file to her case load, the file was reassigned without explanation to another caseworker.

G. Receipt of DHS Documents

On December 15, 21, 22 and 27, 2011, the OEIG received documents from the Local Office. The documents showed that:

- [Employee 3's] last day in the Local Office was September 8, 2009 and that he was in the office on April 13, and 14, 2009;⁶
- According to records for the Local Office's alphabetical assignment system, in October 2008 through January 2009, Ms. Sanderson's case load covered clients with the last names falling between "[redacted];"
- There was no record or notation demonstrating why Ms. Sanderson worked on [child 1's girlfriend's], *i.e.*, [child 1's spouse's] case;
- [Child 1's] December 2010 redetermination application was "not a PSI as documented in the case notes, it was a paper application[;]" and
- [Child 1's] case was never assigned to [employee 2].

H. Second Interview of [employee 1]

On December 21, 2011, investigators interviewed [employee 1]. In her interview, [employee 1] confirmed that caseworkers have the capability of transferring cases amongst themselves, but have been instructed not to do so. [Employee 1] said that, per Local Office practice, if caseworkers feel they cannot work on a file because of a conflict, they are to speak to their supervisor. [Employee 1] said that she was unaware of any instances where caseworkers transferred cases amongst themselves without going through a supervisor.

I. DHS's Re-Audit of [child 1's] and [child 2's] Files and Initial Audit of [child 2's spouse's] Files

After Ms. Sanderson informed investigators that both [child 2] and [child 1] lived with her while receiving benefits, which could potentially affect the amount of benefits that they were

⁶ April 13, and 14, 2009 are two days that Ms. Sanderson made modifications to her son's file ([child 1]), even though the case was assigned to another DHS caseworker, [employee 3].

entitled to, the OEIG requested that DHS re-audit [child 1's] and [child 2's] respective files to take this information into account. The OEIG requested that any calculations include consideration of Ms. Sanderson's income into the benefits calculations for [child 1] and [child 2]. The calculations were also to presume that [child 2] and [child 1] lived with Ms. Sanderson for these dates and that they did not purchase and prepare food separately.

The OEIG's investigation found that, from November 2009 through October 2010, when [child 2's spouse] (then [girlfriend]) was receiving benefits, she listed Ms. Sanderson's address as her mailing address. Accordingly, the OEIG requested that that DHS audit [child 2's spouse's] file under the same parameters as [child 1] and [child 2's] respective audits.

With the aforementioned factors considered, DHS' audit revealed that [child 1] received potential overpayments of approximately \$17,124 from August 2009 through June 2011. With respect to [child 2], he received potential overpayments of \$1,129.00 from September 2009 through December 2009. [Child 2's spouse] received potential overpayments of \$2,400 from November 2009 through October 2010.

IV. Analysis

A. DHS Employee Personal Conduct

Section V, "Employee Personal Conduct," of the DHS Employee Handbook states, "An employee may not authorize assistance, benefits, or services to relatives. . . . Further, an employee may not be directly involved in deciding or redetermining eligibility for DHS services for relatives or household members. . . ."

By her own admission, and as revealed by the evidence, Ms. Sanderson violated Section V of the DHS Employee Handbook by authorizing benefits for her children. Ms. Sanderson clearly worked on the case files for her daughter ([child 1]) and son ([child 2]). Indeed, by her own admission, [child 1] hand-delivered his application to Ms. Sanderson, which she brought in and personally processed. Ms. Sanderson should never have worked on her son's initial application for SNAP benefits. Despite her contention that she thought it was permissible for her to process an initial application, as opposed to a recertification of benefits, the aforementioned policy expressly prohibits employees from "deciding" eligibility for relatives. Likewise, Ms. Sanderson should not have entered or worked on [child 1's] file and should have immediately informed her supervisor of the conflict. Instead, she continued to process the cases and approve benefits for her children.

Accordingly, the allegation that Ms. Sanderson impermissibly awarded and modified benefits for her children, [child 1] and [child 2], and therefore violated Section V, "Employee Personal Conduct," of the DHS Employee Handbook, is **FOUNDED**.

B. Performance of Duties

Section V, "Performance of Duties," requires DHS employees to follow DHS rules and regulations in the performance of their duties. As noted above, the DHS Employee Handbook

clearly prohibits Ms. Sanderson from authorizing assistance, benefits, or services for relatives. By her own admission, Ms. Sanderson chose to willfully disregard this prohibition. Accordingly, the allegation that Ms. Sanderson violated Section V, "Performance of Duties," of the DHS Employee Handbook, is **FOUNDED**.

C. LaJanice Sanderson Failed to Cooperate with the OEIG

At the outset of her July 1, 2011 interview, investigators presented Ms. Sanderson with an Administrative Rights Form. The form states, in relevant part, the she is obligated to cooperate with the OEIG's investigation. The Ethics Act also requires state employees to cooperate with OEIG investigations.⁷ Failure to cooperate includes intentionally omitting or making false statements.⁸

The OEIG concludes that Ms. Sanderson was not truthful in her interview with investigators and therefore failed to cooperate with the OEIG's investigation. While Ms. Sanderson was partially truthful about working on her children's DHS case files, she attempted to obfuscate the degree to which she worked on the files. Ms. Sanderson was also not truthful to investigators about the scope of her involvement in an apparent attempt to mitigate the repercussions of her actions.

For example, Ms. Sanderson first told investigators that she transferred her daughter's file, after initially working on it, when she realized it was her daughter's file. This allegedly would have occurred on June 17, 2010, which was the initial entry Ms. Sanderson made on her daughter's file. Ms. Sanderson's assertion is clearly contradicted by the other entries on [child 1's] file, however, showing that Ms. Sanderson continued to work on the file after June 17, 2010, e.g., the August 31, 2010, October 5, 2010 and December 13, 2010 entries.

Ms. Sanderson was equally untruthful about her involvement with her son's file. While she admits to processing his initial application, she told investigators that any additional work she did was because [child 2's] assigned caseworker was out of the office and she was assigned to work on [child 2's] file on a temporary basis. The OEIG's investigation found, however, that on the dates Ms. Sanderson conducted additional work on [child 2's] file, April 13, 2009 and April 14, 2009, the assigned caseworker ([employee 3]) was in the office. Accordingly, Ms. Sanderson's assertion is demonstratively false.

Likewise, the OEIG finds equally unbelievable Ms. Sanderson's assertion that she did not realize that she was working on her son's then-girlfriend's, [redacted], DHS case. Besides the numerous notations in the case notes clearly referencing her son by either name or noting personal facts about him, the OEIG's investigation found that this case would not have been assigned to Ms. Sanderson pursuant to the Local Office's alphabetical assignment system in place in October 2008 through January 2009. Ms. Sanderson's case load for this time period

⁷ 5 ILCS 430/20-70 ("It is the duty of every officer and employee under the jurisdiction of an Executive Inspector General . . . to cooperate with the Executive Inspector General in any investigation pursuant to this Act.")

⁸ *Id.*

covered clients with the last names falling between “[redacted]-[redacted].” [Child 2’s girlfriend’s] case would not have fallen into this section.

Accordingly, the OEIG concludes as **FOUNDED** that Ms. Sanderson failed to cooperate with the OEIG by making false statements in violation of the Ethics Act.

D. DHS’s Reimbursement for Overpayments

In connection with the issuance of this Final Report, the OEIG recommends that DHS seek reimbursement from [child 2], [child 2’s spouse] and [child 1] for any overpayments that they received. In determining the amount of overpayments, the OEIG requests that DHS consider the calculations contained in this Final Report. The OEIG recognizes, however, that these calculations contain certain presumptions, as outlined below, that DHS may not normally follow. Accordingly, the OEIG requests that, when seeking overpayment, DHS permit [child 2], [child 2’s spouse] and [child 1] the opportunity to present evidence supporting any claims they may have against overpayment.

As outlined in this report, the OEIG requested that DHS audit the aforementioned files in two different manners. The first calculation required that DHS simply review the material contained in files for any errors leading to overpayment, which is the protocol normally followed by DHS. This audit resulted in a finding that [child 1] had received an overpayment of approximately \$14,025 from August 2009 through May 2011. The audit of [child 2’s] file showed no overpayments.

In the second audit, the OEIG directed DHS to make its calculations with certain presumptions, specifically:

- Include Ms. Sanderson’s income in any household income;
- Treat the clients as having resided with Ms. Sanderson for the applicable time period; and,
- Do not apply the purchase and prepare exception allowing two households to reside in the same residence.

The second audit resulted in a finding that [child 1] received overpayments of approximately \$17,124 from August 2009 through June 2011. The audit also showed that [child 2] received overpayments of approximately \$1,129 from September 2009 through December 2009 and [child 2’s spouse] received overpayments of approximately \$2,400 from November 2009 through October 2010.

It is the OEIG’s position that DHS should seek to recover the funds as detailed in the second audit for the following reasons. Given Ms. Sanderson’s involvement with these files, her familial relationship with these clients, and that they shared a residence together, there is an obvious conflict of interest and it is difficult to ascertain the validity of the information contained in these clients’ respective files. Furthermore, as the OEIG finds that Ms. Sanderson has not been truthful with the investigation, there is no justifiable reason to believe that the information she entered into these files was accurate or true. For example, while Ms. Sanderson noted that

[child 1's] December 2010 redetermination application was a PSI, the OEIG's investigation found that it was "not a PSI as documented in the case notes, it was a paper application." While this does not appear to have affected [child 1's] receipt of benefits, or the amount received, it indicates a lack of trustworthiness in Ms. Sanderson's entries in her children's files.

Accordingly, the OEIG recommends that DHS seek reimbursement for overpayments consistent with the second audit, as explained in this Final Report. In seeking reimbursement, DHS should also allow these clients an opportunity to rebut the presumptive factors listed above in the calculation of the second audit and make any necessary changes accordingly.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Following due investigation, the OEIG issues these findings:

- **FOUNDED** – DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson violated Section V, "Employee Personal Conduct," of the DHS Employee Handbook by impermissibly awarding and modifying benefits for her daughter, [child 1].
- **FOUNDED** – DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson violated Section V, "Employee Personal Conduct," of the DHS Employee Handbook by impermissibly awarding and modifying benefits for her son, [child 2].
- **FOUNDED** – By authorizing benefits for her daughter, [child 1], DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson violated Section V, "Performance of Duties," of the DHS Employee Handbook by disregarding the DHS Employee Handbook's prohibition against authorizing assistance, benefits, or services for relatives.
- **FOUNDED** – By authorizing benefits for her son, [child 2], DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson violated Section V, "Performance of Duties," of the DHS Employee Handbook by disregarding the DHS Employee Handbook's prohibition against authorizing assistance, benefits, or services for relatives.
- **FOUNDED** – DHS Caseworker LaJanice Sanderson violated the Ethics Act by failing to cooperate with the OEIG.

The OEIG recommends that LaJanice Sanderson be discharged. Any separation agreement reached with Ms. Sanderson must state that she agrees never to seek, nor to accept, employment with the State of Illinois.

The OEIG further recommends that DHS seek reimbursement for any overpayments to [child 1], [spouse of child 2] and [child 2] consistent with this Final Report.

While the OEIG finds that LaJanice Sanderson made false statements to the OEIG and violated the Ethics Act, under the present circumstances the OEIG is not referring this matter to the Illinois Attorney General's Office for a reasonable cause determination.

No further investigative action is needed and this case is considered closed.



Pat Quinn, Governor

Illinois Department of Human Services

Michelle R.B. Saddler, Secretary

Office of the Secretary
401 South Clinton Street • Chicago, Illinois 60607
100 South Grand Avenue East • Springfield, Illinois 62762

March 14, 2012

Mr. Ricardo Meza
Executive Inspector General
Office of the Executive Inspector General
For the Agencies of the Illinois Governor
32 West Randolph Street, Suite 1900
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Re: OEIG Case No: 11-⁰⁰¹⁸⁹~~00189~~-Final Report

Dear Inspector General Meza:

On February 23, 2012 the OEIG issued a final report in the above matter and made the following findings regarding LaJanice Sanderson, Caseworker at the Rock Island County Family Community Resource Center (FCRC):

- Sanderson improperly awarded and modified benefits for her daughter, _____ and her son _____ and his current wife
- Sanderson violated the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act by not cooperating with the OEIG investigation

Based upon these findings, the OEIG recommended that Sanderson be discharged and that any separation agreement reached with Sanderson must state that she agrees never to seek, nor to accept, employment with the State of Illinois. Also, the OEIG recommended that DHS seek reimbursement for any overpayments made to _____

Regional Office Administrator, reviewed the OEIG final report and made the following findings:

- A Pre-disciplinary meeting was held on March 6, 2012 with Sanderson and an AFSCME representative present.
- Sanderson was placed on paid Administrative Leave on March 6, 2012.
- A written rebuttal from AFSCME was submitted on March 9, 2012.
- Sanderson was suspended for 30 days, pending discharge, effective March 14, 2012.
- Sanderson will be discharged effective April 10, 2012

Mr. Ricardo Meza
March 14, 2012
Page 2 of 2

- DHS is currently working with the Bureau of Collections regarding the overpayment to _____ and _____

DHS is in the process of implementing all of the OEIG recommendations that were outlined in the final report including discharging of the employee and seeking reimbursement of overpayments.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Michelle R.B. Saddler
Secretary

May 10th, 2012

Attention:

IL Dept. of Human Services
100 S Grand Avenue East
Springfield, IL 62762

I LaJanice Sanderson effective today Thursday May 10th 2012 do resign from my position with the State of Illinois Department of Human Services as a Human Service Caseworker at Department of Human Services Local Office at 500 42 Avenue Rock Island, IL 61201.

Sincerely,

5/10/12

LaJanice Sanderson

cc:

LaJanice Sanderson

RECEIVED

Page 1

ILLINOIS
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR RELATIONS

UNION:

AFSCME

GRIEVANT:

LaJanice Sanderson, Human Services Caseworker

AGENCY:

Department of Human Services

ISSUE:

Resignation

RESOLUTION:

In full and complete resolution of the above-captioned matter, the parties agree:

1. The Discharge of the Grievant, LaJanice Sanderson, shall be reversed. The Grievant, LaJanice Sanderson, agrees to resign and hereby voluntarily resigns her Human Services Caseworker position with the Department of Human Services and further agrees not to either seek or accept re-employment with the State of Illinois at any time in the future.
2. Upon receipt of the written resignation by the Department, the personnel records of LaJanice Sanderson will be purged of any mention of discharge, but will contain a copy of the resignation. The time period from April 10, 2012, until the date of resignation shall be considered an unpaid leave of absence.
3. Should the Grievant, LaJanice Sanderson, fail to provide a written resignation by close of business on May 31, 2012 the parties agree that will be considered as discharged.
4. AFSCME and the Grievant, LaJanice Sanderson, agree to refrain from initiating any grievance, administrative or other judicial proceedings arising out of this discharge action or the circumstances that led to the filing of charges of discharge.
5. This resolution is made without precedent or prejudice in the disposition of other cases.

For the Employer

For AFSCME

5/10/12

Date

5-10-2012

Date