

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture



Food and  
Nutrition  
Service

Supplemental  
Nutrition  
Assistance  
Program

Retailer Policy  
Division

Administrative  
and Judicial  
Review Branch

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May 30, 2024

Mansoor Ansari, Attorney  
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RE: [REDACTED]

Dear Counselor:

Enclosed is the revised Final Agency Decision of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in response to your request for an administrative review dated February 21, 2023.

It is the decision of the USDA that there is insufficient evidence to support the Retailer Operations Division's determination to impose a six-month disqualification against Occidental Liquor from participating as an authorized retailer in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The determination is reversed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David A. Shively".

DAVID A. SHIVELY  
Administrative Review Officer

Enclosure

**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Administrative Review Branch**



**Appellant,**

**v.**

**Case Number: C0254478**

**Retailer Operations Division,**

**Respondent.**

**FINAL AGENCY DECISION**

It is the decision of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that there is insufficient evidence to support the determination by the Retailer Operations Division to impose a six-month disqualification of Occidental Liquor (Appellant) from participation as an authorized retailer in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The decision is reversed.

**ISSUE**

The issue accepted for review is whether the Retailer Operations Division took appropriate action, consistent with 7 CFR § 278.6(f)(1) and 7 CFR § 278.6(a) and (e)(5) in its administration of the SNAP, when it imposed a six-month period of disqualification against Appellant.

**AUTHORITY**

7 USC § 2023 and the implementing regulations at 7 CFR § 279.1 provide that “A food retailer or wholesale food concern aggrieved by administrative action under § 278.1, § 278.6 or § 278.7 . . . may file a written request for review of the administrative action with FNS.”

**CASE CHRONOLOGY**

The USDA investigated the compliance of Appellant with federal SNAP law and regulations during the period of May 16, 2022, through July 31, 2022. The investigative report documented personnel at Appellant’s firm accepted SNAP benefits in exchange for ineligible merchandise on three separate occasions. As a result of evidence compiled during this investigation, by letter dated September 1, 2022, the Retailer Operations Division charged ownership with violating the terms and conditions of the SNAP regulations at 7 CFR § 278.2(a) and noted the violations warranted a six-month disqualification period. The letter also stated that under certain conditions, FNS may impose a civil money penalty (CMP) in lieu of a disqualification. Additionally,

Appellant was given 10 days from receipt of the letter to provide a response. On September 6, 2022, Appellant, through counsel, submitted a response to the charge letter.

After considering the evidence and Appellant's response, the Retailer Operations Division notified Appellant in a letter dated February 15, 2023, that the violations cited in the charge letter occurred at the firm and that a six-month period of disqualification was warranted. The letter stated that eligibility for a hardship CMP was not applicable as there were other authorized retail stores in the area selling as large a variety of staple foods at comparable prices.

By email dated February 21, 2023, Appellant requested an administrative review of the Retailer Operations Division's determination. The appeal was granted, and implementation of the disqualification has been held in abeyance pending completion of this review. On April 18, 2024, this appeal was reassigned to Administrative Review Officer David Shively.

### **STANDARD OF REVIEW**

In appeals of adverse actions, the Appellant bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence, that the administrative actions should be reversed. That means the Appellant has the burden of providing relevant evidence which a reasonable mind, considering the record as a whole, would accept as sufficient to support a conclusion that the matter asserted is more likely to be true than not true.

### **CONTROLLING LAW**

The controlling statute in this matter is contained in the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, 7 USC § 2021 and § 278 of Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Sections 278.6(a) and (e)(5) establish the authority upon which a six-month disqualification may be imposed against a retail food store or wholesale food concern.

7 CFR § 278.6(a) states, inter alia:

FNS may disqualify any authorized retail food store . . . if the firm fails to comply with the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, or this part. Such disqualification shall result from a finding of a violation on the basis of evidence that may include facts established through on-site investigations, inconsistent redemption data, evidence obtained through a transaction report under an electronic benefit transfer system . . .

Section 278.6(e)(5) of the SNAP regulations states, in part, that a firm is to be disqualified for six months:

[I]f it is to be the first sanction for the firm and the evidence shows that personnel of the firm have committed violations such as but not limited to the sale of common nonfood items due to carelessness or poor supervision by the firm's ownership or management.

In addition, 7 CFR § 278.6(f)(1) provides for civil money penalty (CMP) assessments in lieu of disqualification in cases where disqualification would cause “hardship” to SNAP households benefit because of the unavailability of a comparable participating food store in the area to meet their shopping needs. It reads:

FNS may impose a civil money penalty as a sanction in lieu of disqualification when . . . the firm’s disqualification would cause hardship to SNAP households benefit because there is no other authorized retail food store in the area selling as large a variety of staple food items.

### **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

A review of the evidence does not support the Retailer Operations Division’s determination in this case. Accordingly, it is unnecessary to address Appellant’s contentions in this matter.

This administrative review decision is based on the specific circumstances of this case as documented by materials provided by Appellant and the Retailer Operations Division. In addition, this administrative review decision does not establish policy or supersede Federal law or regulations.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion above, the determination by the Retailer Operations Division to impose a six-month disqualification against Occidental Liquor from participating as an authorized retailer in SNAP is reversed.

### **RIGHTS AND REMEDIES**

Under the Freedom of Information Act, we are releasing this information in a redacted format as appropriate. FNS will protect, to the extent provided by law, personal information that could constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

David A. Shively  
Administrative Review Officer

May 30, 2024