

Reasons for Decision:

Order #AP1920-0773

On <date removed>, <name removed> filed an appeal respecting the Director's calculation of their health phone allowance. No decision letters were provided as evidence.

<name removed> told the Board that the lowest priced cellular plan that they could purchase had a monthly cost of \$65. Included in the plan are both talk and text functionality.

At the hearing, the Department indicated <name removed> receives the same health phone allowance as all other eligible participants. If <name removed> wishes to purchase a cellular plan with a cost greater than the allowance, they are responsible for covering the additional cost. <name removed>'s budget provides them with additional resources to pay for a higher priced cellular plan, including the disability amount, the volunteer benefit, and the rewarding work benefit.

In response to a question from the Board, <name removed> indicated their cellular plan includes unlimited data, text and calling.

The Board asked <name removed> the reason a data plan was required for a health phone. <name removed> responded, indicating there are no cellular plans that do not include data. <name removed> stated they use the data plan to browse the internet and receive emails. <name removed> acknowledged that the Department was not required to cover the entire cost of their cellular plan, but felt that an increase in the allowance to \$50 would be fair.

The Board asked <name removed> why they did not purchase a call and text only plan that was within the price range of the allowance provided by the Department. <name removed> responded, stating that they were unable to find a plan that could be purchased for the amount of the health phone allowance. The plan they purchased was the lowest priced plan that their cellular provider offered them.

The Board asked <name removed> why they have not looked for lower priced cellular plans as online search results displayed call and text packages with a monthly cost of between \$15 and \$20. <name removed> responded, indicating they were not tech savvy and went with the lowest priced plan their service provider offered. <name removed> stated they were offered a cellular plan that did not include data for \$35 per month, but they required the addition of a data package in order to search for employment.

In response to a question from the Board, <name removed> acknowledged that they understood that employment and income assistance is a program of last resort and the funding for the program comes from tax payers. <name removed> indicated they have attempted to help themselves, but the Department has not assisted them in this endeavor.

At the hearing, <name removed> raised their concerns that while the allowance for a health phone had increased in <year removed> there were no other increases to their budgeted amounts since <year removed>.

The Board notes that cellular plans are available at a cost that are within the price range of the health phone allowance provided to <name removed>. The Board further notes that <name removed> acknowledged that they had the option to purchase a less expensive cellular plan, but they chose to purchase the more expensive plan that included a data package, which they use for reasons unrelated to their health needs.

After careful consideration of the written and verbal evidence submitted to it, the Board determines that the Department assessed <name removed>'s assistance file according to the legislation and regulations. The Board confirms the Director's decision calculating the health phone allowance.

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