STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

PROVIDENCE, SC. **SUPERIOR COURT**

(FILED: November 5, 2026)

SARAH T. GOODE,	:	
***Appellant*,**	:	
	:	
v.	:	**C.A. No. PC-2025-04374**
	:	
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES,	:	
***Appellee*.**	:	

DECISION

MCHUGH, J. Before the Court for decision is the appeal of Sarah T. Goode (Appellant) from a decision of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) issued on August 8, 2025. Jurisdiction is pursuant to G.L. §§ 42-35-15 and 45-23-71.

I

Facts and Travel

On May 16, 2025, Rhode Island Department of Human Services sent a Benefits Decision Notice to Appellant denying her Medicaid application.[1] Benefits Decision Notice at 1. Specifically, the reason given was that the household of Appellant did not file taxes or tax information could not be verified. *Id.* This decision was subject to an Administrative Fair Hearing for appeal with EOHHS. *Id.* at 8.

[1] Documents in the Certified Record are not marked as enumerated exhibits and will be identified in this Decision by the document titles listed on the Record page titled "Certification" followed by a page number where appropriate. Many of the documents in the Certified Record are not internally paginated; however, for clarity purposes any citation to a page number in this decision is in reference to the number of pages listed next to the document's title on the Certification or to the internal pagination when applicable.

Appellant filed her appeal regarding the Medicaid application on June 5, 2025. Abandonment Decision at 3. The Hearing Appointment Notice was e-mailed and sent for mailing to the Appellant on June 17, 2025, indicating that the appointment was to be held via Microsoft Teams, that the hearing was scheduled for Tuesday, July 15, 2025 at 2:20 p.m., and providing the phone number and meeting ID number required to attend the meeting. *Id.* The Appellant did not attend the meeting at the scheduled timeframe. *Id.* EOHHS does not have any record of the Appellant calling in to reschedule the hearing prior to their allotted timeframe. *Id.* EOHHS sent for mailing a Notice of Abandonment on July 22, 2025. *Id.* Appellant replied that the reason she missed the hearing was that she misunderstood the date of the hearing. *Id.*

II

Standard of Review

Review of Administrative Appeal

When reviewing the decision of an administrative agency, the Superior Court "sits as an appellate court with a limited scope of review." *Mine Safety Appliances Co. v. Berry*, 620 A.2d 1255, 1259 (R.I. 1993). The court's review is governed by the Rhode Island Administrative Procedures Act (APA), G.L. 1956 chapter 35 of title 42. *See Iselin v. Retirement Board of Employees' Retirement System of R.I.*, 943 A.2d 1045, 1048 (R.I. 2008) (citing *Rossi v. Employees' Retirement System of R.I.*, 895 A.2d 106, 109 (R.I. 2006)). Section 42-35-15(g) provides, in pertinent part:

> "The court shall not substitute its judgment for that of the agency as to the weight of the evidence on questions of fact. The court may affirm the decision of the agency or remand the case for further proceedings, or it may reverse or modify the decision if substantial rights of the appellant have been prejudiced because the administrative findings, inferences, conclusions, or decisions are:
>
> "(1) In violation of constitutional or statutory provisions;
>
> "(2) In excess of the statutory authority of the agency;

> "(3) Made upon unlawful procedure;
> "(4) Affected by other error of law;
> "(5) Clearly erroneous in view of the reliable, probative, and substantial evidence on the whole record; or
> "(6) Arbitrary or capricious or characterized by abuse of discretion or clearly unwarranted exercise of discretion." Section 42-35-15(g).

"In essence, if 'competent evidence exists in the record, the Superior Court is required to uphold the agency's conclusions.'" *Auto Body Association of Rhode Island v. State of Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation*, 996 A.2d 91, 95 (R.I. 2010) (quoting *Rhode Island Public Telecommunications Authority v. Rhode Island State Labor Relations Board*, 650 A.2d 479, 485 (R.I. 1994)). When reviewing a decision under the APA, the court may not substitute its judgment for that of the agency on questions of fact. *See Johnston Ambulatory Surgical Associates, Ltd. v. Nolan*, 755 A.2d 799, 805 (R.I. 2000). The court defers to the administrative agency's factual determinations, provided that they are supported by legally competent evidence. *Arnold v. Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training Board of Review*, 822 A.2d 164, 167 (R.I. 2003). The court cannot "weigh the evidence [or] pass upon the credibility of witnesses [or] substitute its findings of fact for those made at the administrative level." *E. Grossman & Sons, Inc. v. Rocha*, 118 R.I. 276, 285, 373 A.2d 496, 501 (1977).

Accordingly, the court will "'reverse factual conclusions of administrative agencies only when they are totally devoid of competent evidentiary support in the record.'" *Baker v. Department of Employment and Training Board of Review,* 637 A.2d 360, 363 (R.I. 1994) (quoting *Milardo v. Coastal Resources Management Council*, 434 A.2d 266, 272 (R.I. 1981)).

The court is free to conduct a *de novo* review of determinations of law made by an agency. *See Arnold*, 822 A.2d at 167 (citing *Johnston Ambulatory Surgical Associates*, 755 A.2d at 805). As such, "when the language of the statute is clear and unambiguous, the court must interpret it

literally, giving the words of the statute their plain and ordinary meanings." *Labor Ready Northeast, Inc. v. McConaghy*, 849 A.2d 340, 345 (R.I. 2004) (citing *Stebbins v. Wells*, 818 A.2d 711, 715 (R.I. 2003)). "An agency cannot modify the statutory provisions under which it acquired power, unless such an intent is clearly expressed in the statute." *Little v. Conflict of Interest Commission*, 121 R.I. 232, 236, 397 A.2d 884, 886 (1979). When a statute is ambiguous, "the construction given by the agency charged with its enforcement is entitled to weight and deference as long as that construction is not clearly erroneous or unauthorized." *Gallison v. Bristol School Committee*, 493 A.2d 164, 166 (R.I. 1985).

The court is limited to the certified record in its determination as to whether legally competent evidence exists to support the agency's decision. *Barrington School Committee v. Rhode Island State Labor Relations Board*, 608 A.2d 1126, 1138 (R.I. 1992). Legally competent or substantial evidence is "relevant evidence that a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion, and means [an] amount more than a scintilla but less than a preponderance." *Caswell v. George Sherman Sand & Gravel Co., Inc.*, 424 A.2d 646, 647 (R.I. 1981).

III

Analysis

This matter appears before the Court on appeal from the EOHHS decision to deny the appeal of Appellant regarding their decision because she abandoned her hearing of a Medicaid coverage denial. Appellant filed her Complaint to restore her ability to pursue an appeal with EOHHS. EOHHS regulations provide the framework by which a failure to attend a hearing may be considered. To reverse an abandonment, there must be good cause for failure to attend a hearing. *See* 210 RICR 10-05-2.3.1(E). As EOHHS points out, the scenarios that provide for good

cause may be grouped into two categories: unplanned events that take priority and barriers that affect the Appellant's ability to attend. *See* 210 RICR 10-05-2.3.1(E)(3).

Appellant states that she made an error regarding the assigned dates for her hearing and thus did not attend said hearing. Compl. at 1. While this Court is sympathetic to a misunderstanding of hearing dates, it is bound by the regulations that govern the administrative process of EOHHS. Section 42-35-15(g). Rhode Island General Laws provide six distinct scenarios where this Court

> "may reverse or modify the decision if substantial rights of the appellant have been prejudiced because the administrative findings, inferences, conclusions, or decisions are (1) In violation of constitutional or statutory provisions; (2) In excess of the statutory authority of the agency; (3) Made upon unlawful procedure; (4) Affected by other error of law; (5) Clearly erroneous in view of the reliable, probative, and substantial evidence on the whole record; or (6) Arbitrary or capricious or characterized by abuse of discretion or clearly unwarranted exercise of discretion." Section 42-35-15(g).

Otherwise, "if 'competent evidence exists in the record, the Superior Court is required to uphold the agency's conclusions.'" *Auto Body Association of Rhode Island*, 996 A.2d at 95 (quoting *Rhode Island Public Telecommunications Authority*, 650 A.2d at 485).

Because the record is clear that the Appellant's reasons for abandoning the hearing do not fall into either of the categories described by 210 RICR 10-05-2.3.1(E), and the decision does not fall into the six categories wherein this Court may reverse or modify the decision as laid out by § 42-35-15(g), this Court is bound by EOHHS' decision.

IV

Conclusion

For the reasons stated above, this Court affirms the decision of EOHHS. Counsel shall prepare the appropriate order.

RHODE ISLAND SUPERIOR COURT

Decision Addendum Sheet

TITLE OF CASE:	**Goode v. Department of Human Services**
CASE NO:	**PC-2025-04374**
COURT:	**Providence County Superior Court**
DATE DECISION FILED:	**November 5, 2026**
JUSTICE/MAGISTRATE:	**McHugh, J.**
ATTORNEYS:	
For Plaintiff:	**Sarah T. Goode, *pro se***
For Defendant:	**Shawn J. Masse, Esq.**