

T Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

While budget-related issues have occupied much of my time this month, I am also focused on several program areas. I am particularly interested in the Food Stamp Program and in doing everything possible to increase participation in that program. Many of you have expressed concern that attempts to increase participation may lead to an increase in the error rate. This is a legitimate concern and one to which I am very sensitive. But I am also extremely concerned about Massachusetts' low food stamp participation rate.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently published Food Stamp Program participation information for 1999. Participation rates are determined by looking at a variety of factors including census records, per capita income information and the number of people actually receiving food stamp benefits. While this information is not as current as I would like, it is still a public indicator of how states are doing with food stamp participation; and unfortunately, Massachusetts ranks near the bottom with a participation rate of 43%. Only two states, Kansas and Nevada, had lower participation rates. In addition to our low 1999 participation rate, Massachusetts was one of ten states with the largest decrease in participation in the years immediately preceding 1999. I am sharing this information with you to help you understand why I am so focused on reversing this trend.

A variety of steps are already being taken to turn us in the right direction. Some will work; some will not. But the important thing is that we are going to try them. People fail to participate in the Food Stamp Program for a variety of reasons. No one solution will convince every eligible family or individual to give it a try. Things being

Child Support

TAFDC

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 029

Chapter XIII, Section G: Child Support, has been updated to include the procedures listed below.

- The AU Manager no longer forwards the yellow copy of the T-A34/36 to DOR. The yellow copy is kept with the AU record submitted to the Unit Supervisor. The Supervisor forwards the yellow copy to the TAO's DOR Liaison (generally the TAO Assistant Director) who then forwards all forms and pertinent information to DOR.
- The T-A34/36 form has been revised to collect assignment of rights and good cause information on multiple noncustodial parents.
- An absent parent includes someone who has been convicted of an offense, is under sentence of the court, is complying with the sentence that requires public work and is permitted by the court to live at home while serving the sentence. An absent parent is someone who has been or is expected to be absent from the home for at least 20 days.
- On the Absence windows, the member listed is the AU grantee, who is not necessarily the parent of the child, though the parent of the child may be included in the AU. While the grantee is responsible overall for providing information needed to determine eligibility, it is the parent of the child who should be providing the absent parent information.
- An assessed person who claims domestic violence as the good cause reason for noncooperation or who refuses to cooperate but does not claim good cause should be referred to the Domestic Violence Specialist to discuss the situation.
- The steps DOR takes to make it safer for the assessed person to establish paternity have been added.

From the Forms File

New Form

The following form must be completed to request transportation services for an EA AU being placed in a hotel/motel. Transportation is provided by a private bus carrier or van to transport the EA AU to and from bus terminals, from a bus terminal to a hotel/motel, or from a TAO in the Greater Boston region to another TAO.

13-250-0702-05

EA-TRANS (7/2002)

Homeless Transportation Request Form

Revised Forms

The T-A34/36 has been revised to record noncustodial parent information and collect up to three good cause claims.

02-201-0702-05

02-260-0702-05 (S)

T-A34/36 (Rev. 7/2002)

Assignment of Support Rights, Cooperation with Child Support, or Good Cause Claim

Obsolete Guide

Information on noncitizen status and program eligibility is now found online and on the DTA Web site.

02-275-0799-05

NCDG (7/99)

Noncitizen Desk Guide

SSPS Screen Revisions

The Systems User's Guide Update 151 TAFDC, EAEDC, EA Volume 3: **SSPS User's Guide** Chapter II: Data Entry & Retrieval

Two SSPS screens have been revised:

- the Shelter Authorization - Entry Screen, and
- the SSPS Invoice Inquiry Screen.

The Shelter Authorization screen allows data-entry of the AUs actual shelter entry/shelter exit date. The SSPS Invoice Inquiry screen will allow AU Managers to view specific dates of service for a Shelter Authorization, i.e., **shelter entry** and **shelter exit**. These revisions apply only to Contracted Shelters.

"...despite our differences, we're all alike. Beyond identities and desires there is a common core of self - - an essential humanity whose nature is peace and whose expression is thought and whose action is unconditional love. When we identify with that inner core, respecting it and honoring it in others as well as ourselves, we experience healing in every area of life."

Joan Borysenko

Minding the Body, Mending the Mind

Continued from Page 1

explored or that we plan to implement include:

- Research staff in the Program Assessment unit are analyzing data to determine participation rates by local office or geographic area. We will use this information to decide if some outreach efforts should have a geographic focus.
- Ways to increase participation of SSI recipients are being explored both internally and with the Social Security Administration.
- This month we issued Field Operations Memo 2002-16 which focused on waiving face-to-face interviews. This was done in recognition of the fact that some people fail to participate because the requirement of an in-office interview is burdensome.
- We are finalizing a shortened paper application which will be available in community centers, health centers and through other organizations. This application, which uses easy-to-understand terms, may encourage individuals to apply for food stamp benefits.
- In October we plan to implement a Food Stamp Transitional Benefit Alternative (TBA). TBA will allow families leaving TAFDC to continue receiving food stamp benefits for five months at the same amount they received as TAFDC recipients. For families just starting a new job, knowing their food-related budget will be stable is a tremendous support.

Especially in light of the budget situation and the constraints we are all feeling, these efforts have been developed keeping in mind the operational pressures we are all facing, both in the field and in central office.

As with everything we undertake, your support is critical to our success. With that support, I know that we can increase Food Stamp Program participation and maintain an acceptable error rate. I welcome any ideas you may have on how we can work together to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,



John Wagner
Commissioner

External Agency Matches and Reevaluations and the New 60-Month Period

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 030

Chapter II, Section A: TAO Office Explorer Views, has been revised to:

- update key features of the Match Detail window;
- define the disposition status of "sleep"; and
- provide procedures to be followed to disposition DSS Placement matches, Earned Income matches, SSN Verification matches, and Unearned Income matches.

The format of the Views identified above is different from the format of existing Views and provides greater detail. Existing and new Views will transition to the new format used for these Views. During this transition, readers will note that Views are documented in two distinct formats.

Chapter IV, Section C: Reevaluations/NPA FS Quarterly Reporting has been revised to:

- include procedures for processing reevaluations for TAFDC AUs in a new 60-month period - i.e. checking the 24-month clock and Work Program Requirements.

The information provided by this update obsoletes Field Operations Memo 2001-37.

Changes to the Food Stamp Calculation for Combination FS/SSFSP AUs

FS, SSFSP

State Letter 1227

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 031

This State Letter and this Update transmit changes to the food stamp calculation for combination FS/SSFSP AUs in accordance with USDA regulations. The User's Guide has been updated with step-by-step instructions for determining benefits for combination FS/SSFSP AUs. The new calculation maximizes the federal benefit, simplifies the calculation and eliminates proration.

FYI

Change Reporting Notice

A Change Reporting Notice was mailed in July to active TAFDC, STAFDC, EAEDC, FS and SSFSP Assistance Units (AUs). FS AUs subject to FS Quarterly Reporting or receiving SSI were not included in this mailing. This mailing reminded AUs to report any changes that may affect eligibility or the amount of their benefits. Undelivered mail will be returned to Central Office and then forwarded to the AU Manager who must take the appropriate action on the AU.

Miscellaneous Food Stamp Changes and Changes Resulting From PRWORA Final Regulations

FS, SSFSP

State Letter 1229

This State Letter transmits miscellaneous food stamp changes and other changes in accordance with USDA's final PRWORA rules.



BEACON Todays Issued in July 2002

BT 88 BEACON Release 2.0.16 (6/24/02)

BT 89 Changes to the Food Stamp Calculation for Combination FS/SSFSP AUs Only (6/24/02)

BT 90 Frequently Asked Questions (7/1/02)

BT 91 Program Accuracy and Household Expenses (7/1/02)

The example on page 2 contained an error. The rental amounts in the last paragraph were transposed.

BT 92 BEACON Release Date and FMCS Release Date (7/10/02)

Example 2 contained an error. The second-to-last bullet should read "NPA FS approval" instead of "PA FS approval."

These corrections have been made online.

BT 93 Revision of the Food Stamp Calculation for Combination FS/SSFSP AUs (7/26/02)



Transportation for Hotel Families

EA

EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance , SSI Special Benefits and BEACON Update 007

This Update describes the transportation services that are available to an EA AU when the EA AU is unable to get to the hotel/motel on their own or by using public transportation.

Transportation services are used to transport the EA AU who:

- is being placed in a hotel/motel;
- is being transferred from one hotel/motel to another hotel/motel or shelter; or
- must return to the TAO from the hotel/motel (available only when the van schedule permits). Van service is primarily available to TAOs in the Greater Boston region.

The ***Homeless Transportation Request Form*** (EA-TRANS) must be completed to request the transportation service.

TAFDC, EAEDC and FS Noncitizen Changes

TAFDC, STAFDC, EAEDC, FS, SSFSP
State Letter 1228

This State Letter revises policy to:

- comply with food stamp rules for noncitizen eligibility as a result of PRWORA final regulations;
- remove specific verification requirements from TAFDC, EAEDC and FS regulations; and
- add Victims of Severe Forms of Trafficking as an eligible noncitizen status for TAFDC and EAEDC applicants or recipients.

The Noncitizen Online Guide also has been revised to include additional descriptors for eligible noncitizens. Information on noncitizen status and program eligibility may also be found on the DTA web site.

From the Hotline

Since the release of BEACON 2.0.16, a number of questions regarding changes to the food stamp calculations for combination FS/SSFSP AUs have been raised. This month's Hotline Focus will address some of the more common issues concerning this topic. For additional information regarding the food stamp calculation for combination FS/SSFSP AUs, refer to State Letter 1227, 106 CMR 365.520 and BUG # 031.

Q. How is child support income received directly by the AU treated in the combination FS/SSFSP AU calculation?

A. Child support income belongs to the child(ren) in the AU. It should therefore be entered for each child so that the income is correctly attributed.

Q. How is DEFRA income treated in the combination FS/SSFSP AU calculation?

A. DEFRA income belongs to the parent in the AU and should be entered as the parent's income on BEACON so that the income is correctly attributed.

Q. How is SSI income treated in the combination FS/SSFSP AU calculation?

A. SSI income belongs to the AU member for whom it is intended. Therefore, if an applicant receives SSI in his or her name for one of the children, the income should be entered under that child's name on BEACON with the appropriate claim number.

Q. How is RSDI income treated in the combination FS/SSFSP AU calculation?

A. RSDI income belongs to the AU member for whom it is intended. Therefore, if an applicant receives RSDI in his or her name for one of the children, the income should be entered under that child's name on BEACON with the appropriate claim number.

Q. How is Unemployment Compensation income with a dependent allowance treated in the combination FS/SSFSP AU calculation?

A. Unemployment Compensation income with a dependent allowance belongs to the person receiving it. Even when Unemployment Compensation includes a dependent allowance, the full amount is attributable to the adult receiving it.

Restoration of SSFSP Benefits

SSFSP
Field Operations Memo
2002-15

- Some SSFSP funding has been made available and the Department will provide SSFSP benefits for the month of July only.
- Notices were sent July 15, 2002 to active AUs with an SSFSP member on file as of the close of business July 11, 2002, informing them that benefits were restored for the month of July only.
- This memo includes AU Manager instructions for issuing SSFSP benefits to AUs approved after July 11, 2002 but eligible for full or prorated July cyclical benefits.

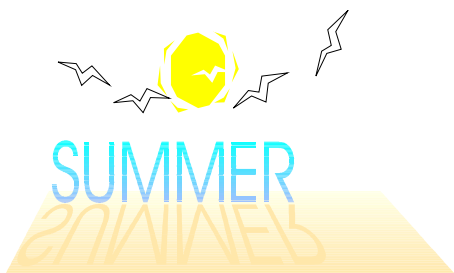


Waiving In-Office Face-to-Face Interviews for NPA FS AUs

FS, SSFSP

Field Operations Memo
2002-16

- USDA has clarified that more waivers of the in-office face-to-face interview should be given to applicants and recipients.
- All NPA FS AUs must be reviewed during the (re)application or recertification process to determine if a waiver of the in-office face-to-face interview is appropriate.
- AU Managers must inform applicants and recipients of their right to request a waiver of the in-office face-to-face interview.
- Applicants and recipients who have a hardship reason automatically qualify for a waiver of the in-office face-to-face interview. AU Managers are encouraged to waive in-office face-to-face interviews whenever possible.



FYI

Closing an AU Member and Changing the Address on Domestic Violence AUs

When domestic violence is reported in an assistance unit (AU), the victim must first be made aware of the domestic violence services and waivers that are available to her. The AU Manager must also remember to complete the Domestic Violence window at the Program Administration workflow or the Domestic Violence window at the Request for Assistance workflow. A referral to the Domestic Violence Specialist as well as the possibility of indicating a heightened level of security on BEACON should be discussed.

If the victim and her children move to a domestic violence shelter and the abuser had been a part of the TAFDC AU, remember to take the following steps on BEACON:

- First, close the abuser out of the TAFDC AU as the mother and children are no longer living with him, using the Reason Category of: Residency and the Closing Reason: Whereabouts Unknown (mail returned) or Requested Closure so that the closure will not pend; and
- the next day, once the closing notice has been generated to the former address, the victim's new address may be entered.

Most domestic violence shelters use a PO Box in their address to avoid disclosing their location. When changing the address to a PO Box on BEACON, enter the PO Box on Line 1 of the Mailing address' pop-up window.

By following this two-day process, the confidentiality required in this situation will be maintained. Otherwise, if the address on the AU is changed before the abuser is taken out of the AU, mail intended for the abuser from other government agencies such as the Division of Medical Assistance will be directed to the domestic violence shelter thereby potentially disclosing the location of the victim and the shelter.

For more details on how to enter information regarding domestic violence households onto BEACON, refer to ***A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON***, pages IV-A-5 and IV-A-6 as well as pages XVI-D-1 through XVI-D-3.