Iransitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

As autumn rolls in, it's the time of year that the Department, and the Commonwealth, celebrate the Performance Recognition Program (PRP) winners.

Senior staff in Central Office have just hosted a luncheon for our ten PRP winners to honor those employees who have demonstrated exemplary work performance. As I mentioned in my remarks to the group, not only do these folks exemplify our mission, but they embody the true nature of being a public servant.

These winners span a broad segment of our DTA family in both geography and in function. From Central Office, **Rochelle Brunson** and **James Downey** were selected for their work within Administration and Finance. Rochelle has taken on the planning for Central Office spacing needs affecting those of us who work at 600 Washington. She has taken on this enormous project in addition to all of her other regular assignments, delivering a workable plan for reorganization of the spacing needs in Central Office. James works in the Fraud Investigations and Recoveries (FIR) Unit of ANF and has supervised an ambitious project that has resulted in uniform financial and process reports used in the Unit. In addition, his hard work has allowed the Department to fulfill its requirements under our Food Stamp Corrective Action Plan, certified by USDA/FNS.

From the Cape we have **Mary Shannahan** from the Hyannis TAO. Mary was recognized for her outstanding performance as a receptionist in the Hyannis office, even volunteering to assemble application packets while out on medical leave. Mary is known for her dedication to our recipients and the respect she illustrates whenever she deals with them. In Brockton, **Catherine Nocella** received an award for her

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efforts to increase access to the Food Stamp Program, going above and beyond her normal assignments, creating a database of callers and mailed food stamp applications, assisting the office's efforts on food stamp outreach.

Regional Director **Yasmin Otero** was honored for the leadership she exhibited and long hours of work she endured for many weeks at Camp Edwards, site of Massachusetts' efforts to assist those evacuated from the Gulf Coast due to last year's hurricanes. Yasmin traveled from Springfield to the Cape, putting in many long days and weekends. Her assignment lasted several months and to this day she continues to be relied upon to help those families transition to life in Massachusetts. Also volunteering to help hurricane victims access our services is **Evelyn French** who works in our Revere TAO. Evelyn was recognized for those efforts as well as her ever optimistic attitude in serving the homeless and those applying for food stamps. She also was recognized for her contributions during the phasing in of our Bay State CAP program.

Dianne Juarez is a BERS A/B worker in our Dorchester TAO. Not only does Dianne go above her normal duties in assisting co-workers with BEACON and training issues, she always is willing to help out and fill in for absent staff, making sure that essential functions of the office are covered. Working as a team, **Ana Nazario** and **Richard Pina** were recognized from the Newmarket Square TAO. Ana and Richard are front-desk reception clerks dealing with homeless and NPA food stamp cases in one of our busiest offices (often assisting over 400 clients per day). Due to staff retirements, Ana and Richard have taken on additional responsibilities and assignments and have managed them effectively and professionally.

From our Central Office Legal Unit, **Cushing Giesey** was honored for his assistance on the Department's development of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) which will soon provide, for the first time, statewide reports and counts of homeless individuals. Above and beyond all of his legal assignments, Cushing participated on many committees and worked out the legal agreements which have made HMIS a successful reality.

In addition to our PRP winners, I must also mention the great work for which the North Shore TAO has been recognized.

From the Hotline

- Q. A TAFDC recipient came into our office today and reported that she just received \$3,000 in lottery winnings. Since the asset limit for the TAFDC Program is \$2,500, can she still be eligible for cash benefits?
- A. Yes. In the TAFDC Program, lottery winnings are considered nonrecurring lump sum income. Once you are made aware of a recipient's lump sum payment, the next step is to find out what the recipient has done with the payment.
- Q. When a TAFDC recipient reports winning \$3,000 in the lottery but then explains that all of the money has been spent, is any of the payment still countable?
- A. Yes, a portion of the payment may still be counted. To determine the countable amount of the lump sum income in TAFDC, certain exclusions must first be applied.

 Refer to 106 CMR
 204.240 for the complete list of allowable exclusions.

In addition, A User's
Guide: Transitional
Assistance Programs and

AR Referral Search List (Overpayments and Recovery), BEACON Changes to Reevaluation Types 8 FYI - BEACON Online Help 8 8 FYI - Changes to DTA Online **FYI - Changes to EOHHS** mass.gov DTA Homepage 9 **FYI - Changes to Policy Online** 9 FYI - Expiring IPV **Disqualifications** 9 FYI - Fuel Assistance 2006 10 FYI - New "Benefit Type" for Certain AUs and Display of **ESP and Employment Participation Hours** Clarification 10 FYI-Update to the DTA EOHHS Homepage - ESP Component/ **Activity Descriptions** 10 **FYI - Voluntary Request to** Close Case - Recipient Mailing 11 FYI - Work Program **Sanction Desk Guide** 12

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BEACON, pages XIV-E-1 through XIV-E-6 list the step-by-step procedures for entering lump sum income into BEACON.

- Q. Can lump sum exclusions include expenses paid by the TAFDC recipient after she actually receives her lump sum payment?
- A. Yes. Expenses paid by the TAFDC recipient after she receives her lump sum payment are allowable exclusions as long as the costs were incurred while awaiting receipt of the lump sum payment.

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Later this month, representatives from that office will be featured in an award ceremony in Phoenix, receiving a national "Hunger Champions" award from USDA, for their impressive efforts to help recipients access the Food Stamp Program.

Join me in congratulating all of these DTA employees for their exemplary and inspiring work. Their recognition and honor shines upon us all as DTA employees and provides me with great pride, admiration, and motivation!

Sincerely,

John Wagner, Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

For example, a recipient may have put off going to the dentist because she didn't know how she would pay for it. Two days after notification of her upcoming property damage award, she schedules a dental appointment. The dental bill is paid after the lump sum is actually received but the cost was incurred while awaiting receipt of her lump sum and therefore it is an allowable exclusion.

- **Q.** Since the TAFDC recipient who won \$3,000 in the lottery also happens to be receiving food stamp benefits, are there any adjustments that I need to make in her food stamp benefits?
- A. In this situation, you do not need to make any adjustments in the food stamp benefits. In the Food Stamp Program, lottery winnings are considered a lump sum treated as an asset in the month of receipt. Since she and her child are still eligible and receiving TAFDC and there are no other individuals in the home, this is a categorically eligible food stamp assistance unit. Assistance Units that are categorically eligible, as defined in 106 CMR 365.180, automatically satisfy the asset eligibility criteria for food stamp benefits.
- **Q.** If a 40-year-old, able-bodied food stamp recipient with no children who lives alone reports timely on a \$3,000 lottery payment, should I stop his food stamp benefits because the payment exceeds the food stamp asset limit?
- A. If receipt of a lump sum payment puts the individual over the asset eligibility limit, then the recipient must be allowed to update his asset statement. This means that if, for example, the individual takes \$2,000 from his lottery payment to pay a rental arrearage, then only \$1,000 from the lottery payment may actually be considered a countable asset. This recipient would then remain below the asset limit for the Food Stamp Program. For information on nonrecurring lump sum payments in the Food Stamp Program, refer to 106 CMR 363.130(E).

NOTE: The Food Stamp Program has a transfer of assets regulation that applies to applicants as well as recipients. If an applicant or recipient knowingly transfers assets for the purpose of establishing or maintaining eligibility for food stamp benefits, the entire Assistance Unit may be disqualified. For more information on transfer of assets in the Food Stamp Program, refer to 106 CMR 363.150.

From the Forms File

New Form

13-310-0906-05 STR-1 (9/2006) Shelter Transfer Request

This form was designed to facilitate the transfer of a homeless family to a shelter that can deliver more appropriate services. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-42 for more information.

New Desk Guide

26-410-1006-05 WPS-DG (10/2006) Work Program Sanction Process

This desk guide was created for use as a reference tool by AU Managers and Supervisors to help manage the work program sanction process. Refer to the FYI Work Program Sanction Desk Guide in this issue of *Transitions*.

Revised Forms

18-070-1006-05 18-185-1006-05 (S) VLA (Rev. 10/2006) Shared Housing Verification

This form has been revised to include a question to help AU Managers determine whether the AU should receive the rent allowance. This was a suggestion received from a TAO staff person.

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09-375-1006-05 09-376-1006-05 (S) FS-USR-2 (Rev. 10/2006) Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

The Noncategorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Standards were revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standards.

02-195-1006-05 TAFDC-4 (Rev. 10/2006) Verification of Caring for the Disabled

The TAFDC-4 has been revised in conjunction with the automation of the tracking of Caring for the Disabled Assistance Units. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-41 for more information.

Revised Brochure

09-070-1006-05 09-079-1006-05 (S) FSP-INFO (Rev. 10/2006) How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

The Income Standard for households without children under 19 or without elderly or disabled household members has been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard.

TAFDC - Removing the Learning Disability Screening and Assessment Question on the Nonfinancials Q&A Navigator

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2006-36

Field Operations Memo 2006-14: *TAFDC - Learning Disability Screening and Assessment Clarifications and Revised Form* in part gave AU Managers instructions for answering the Learning Disability question on the Nonfinancials Q&A Navigator. Field Operations Memo 2006-36 instructs AU Managers that, effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.20, the Learning Disability question on the Nonfinancials Q&A Navigator has been removed.

TAFDC - Automatic Closings for TAFDC/SSI Recipients

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2006-37

Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.20, TAFDC Assessed Persons (APs) who are approved for and begin receiving SSI will be automatically closed. This will prevent double payments (TAFDC and SSI State Supplement) for both adults and children. Additionally, BEACON will automatically adjust the AP's:

- work program requirements;
- mandatory/responsibility reasons; and
- previous TAFDC work program sanctions (by removing them).

BEACON will also adjust the AU Exemption Status. EAEDC Assistance Units (AUs) continue to be automatically closed upon receipt of SSI benefits for single-person AUs or reduced/terminated for caretaker family AUs.

BEACON Changes to Reevaluation Types

FS

Field Operations Memo 2006-38

This Field Operations Memo:

- describes the BEACON changes included with Increment
 2.1.20 that affect Reevaluation Type; and
- stresses the importance of making sure the correct information has been entered into BEACON so the system will select the correct Reevaluation Type and send the AU the appropriate notice and recertification form, if any.

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TAFDC - New ESP Component/Activity: Job Search/Job Readiness

TAFDC

State Letter 1316 Field Operations Memo 2006-39

The Department is in the process of making changes to the TAFDC Program to meet revised federal Transitional Aid to Needy Families (TANF) guidelines. As part of these changes, the current Basic Job Search and Structured Job Search activities are being combined into one activity: Job Search/Job Readiness.

Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.20, the Component/Activity of "Job Search/Job Readiness" will replace the activities of "Basic Job Search" and "Structured Job Search."

The State Letter transmits the following changes to the Employment Services Program (ESP):

- "Basic Job Search" and "Structured Job Search" are being combined to one component: "Job Search/Job Readiness."
- "TEMP Community Service" is being changed to "Community Service" to align the component name with its current name.
- References to minimum participation of 75% are eliminated. This is because there is a 100% participation requirement (unless good cause applies) for those people using an ESP activity to meet the work program.

The Field Operations Memo:

- describes the new "Job Search/Job Readiness" activity;
- gives procedures for transitioning recipients currently enrolled in "Basic Job Search" into "Job Search/Job Readiness"; and
- gives an overview of BEACON functionality changes.



Food Stamp Program: October 1, 2006 Cost-of-Living Increase

State Letter 1315 Field Operations Memo 2006-40

State Letter 1315 and Field Operations Memo 2006-40 implement the annual cost-ofliving changes in the Food Stamp Program.

Maximum Food Stamp Benefit

The maximum food stamp benefit levels for all Assistance Unit sizes have increased.

Income Eligibility Standards

The Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

Shelter Deduction

The Maximum Shelter Deduction (for Assistance Units not containing an elderly or disabled member) increased to \$417.

Standard Utility Allowance

The Heating Standard Utility Allowance increased to \$528. The Nonheating Standard Utility Allowance increased to \$320. The Telephone Standard Utility allowance increased to \$37.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction

The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at \$143.

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Standard Deduction

The Standard Deduction amounts for AU sizes four and greater have increased.

Automation of the Tracking of TAFDC Caring for the Disabled AUs

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2006-41

This memo:

- explains to TAO staff the automated "Caring for the Disabled re-verification process";
- provides "start-up" instructions to TAO staff for APs who currently have an exemption for caring for the disabled; and
- informs TAO staff that the Verification of Caring for the Disabled (TAFDC-4) form has been revised. A question concerning the full-time school status of the child has been added.

"I am only one, but still, I am one. I cannot do everything but I can do something. And, because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do what I can."

Edward Everett Hale

Shelter Transfer Request

EA

Field Operations Memo 2006-42

A *Shelter Transfer Request* form has been designed to facilitate the transfer of a homeless family to a shelter that can deliver more appropriate services.

Food Stamp Permanent Verifications in BEACON

FS

Field Operation Memo 2006-43

This memo:

- addresses issues related to reverification of information that is considered permanently verified; and
- informs AU Managers that reverification of an applicant's/ recipient's SSN or date of birth is not required unless a change is made in BEACON, or the information is questionable.

Switching Group Home Residents from Bay State CAP to Regular Food Stamps

FS

Field Operations Memo 2006-44

Due to recent United States Department of Agriculture clarification, group home residents are no longer eligible to receive Bay State CAP benefits. This Field Operations Memo discusses the impact of this change on TAO staff and provides AU Managers with instructions for processing these AUs and also describes error rate implications.

EA Assistance Units: Residential Facility Window Changes

EA

Field Operations Memo 2006-45

Changes have been made to the BEACON Residential Facility window to provide more complete shelter placement information on EA AUs.

The changes include the addition of:

• a field for the number of units (rooms) the EA AU is

occupying, which must be reviewed and changed if the AU is occupying more than one unit; and

• new "Start" and "Exit reasons." When the old start reason was "eviction," AU Managers must reenter the start reason with one of the new eviction reasons.

TAFDC - Removing Obsolete References to Administrative Agencies

TAFDC

State Letter 1317

This State Letter removes obsolete references to Title IV and DHHS because TAFDC is solely administered by Massachusetts, and its structure is defined by Massachusetts law.

AR Referral Search List (Overpayments and Recovery), BEACON Changes to Reevaluation Types

ALL

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 072

This update:

- clarifies AU Managers' responsibilities resulting from the expiration of an Intentional Program Violation (IPV) sanction;
- updates Accounts Receivable referral policy and procedures for benefit overpayment and recovery;
- reflects BEACON changes to Food Stamp Reevaluation Types;
- updates the Index; and
- issues Appendix D, Food Stamp Reevaluation Types Allowed by AU Assignment.



FYI

BEACON Online Help

BEACON Online Help Update Issue # 1 summarizes the latest revisions to BEACON Online Help.

BEACON Online Help Updates has been added as an option on the Policy Online Main Menu.

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month you will see the following changes to DTA Online:

Diversity - Events

The Diversity - Events option includes a link to the October diversity event entitled *National Disability Employment Awareness Month*.

Latest News Photo Gallery

The list of options now includes a link entitled *Performance Recognition Program Winners*. When the link is selected, an announcement about the PRP winners from Commissioner Wagner and picture taken at a recent presentation will be displayed.

Recognition/Awards

A link entitled *Food Stamp Bonus Award* displays a memo from Commissioner Wagner,

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pictures taken, and a press release announcing the award of \$1.1 million to the Massachusetts Food Stamp Program.

A link entitled 2006 Performance Recognition Award Winners displays the memo from Commissioner Wagner announcing this year's winners of the Commonwealth Citation for Outstanding Performance.

Training - Job Aids

Two links entitled *Welfare Reform II* and *Welfare Reform Student Handout* have been added to the list of available options.

Welfare Reform Q/A's

The list of options includes a new option entitled *Welfare Reform Q/A's*. When selected, a list of Welfare Reform questions and finalized answers, sorted by topic, will be displayed. These questions include those called in to the Policy Hotline and those received at the training sessions.

FYI

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

This month you will see the following changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage:

Programs and Services - Employment Services Program (ESP)

Descriptions of the various components of the ESP Program have been updated to reflect Welfare Reform.

News and Updates

The list of options includes a link to the press release entitled *USDA Awards \$1.1 Million to Massachusetts Food Stamp Program*. When selected, the press release and pictures taken at the presentation of the award to Commissioner Wagner will be displayed.

Research and Statistics

The TAFDC, EAEDC, SSI and Homeless Individual and Family caseload reports have been updated with FY07 information.

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

This month you will see the following changes to Policy Online:

Policy Online Main Menu

The Policy Online Main Menu includes a new option entitled *BEACON Online Help Updates*. When selected, the list displays the updates to BEACON online help.

Online Guides

The list of online guides includes a new online guide entitled *Work Program Sanction Process Deskguide*.

FYI

Expiring IPV Disqualifications

Individuals nearing the end of an Intentional Program Violation (IPV) disqualification period are listed in the BEACON view "Assessed Person Potential Changes" under the dropdown menu heading "Clients in Active AUs with Expiring IPV End Dates." Households containing disqualified individuals receive a notice before the disqualification period ends telling them to contact their worker to schedule an appointment for a reevaluation of benefits. However, AU Managers must follow up on the view to determine if reinstatement is appropriate or if any changes occurred during the disqualification period that may affect continued eligibility.

AU Managers must conduct a reevaluation for TAFDC or EAEDC AUs with an expiring disqualification period, so that TAFDC or EAEDC and PA food stamp benefits for disqualified individuals may be reinstated, if appropriate. NPA food stamp AUs must be reviewed before reinstatement. If appropriate, conduct a reevaluation and recertify the NPA food stamp AU.

FYI

Fuel Assistance 2006

The fuel assistance mailing took place in September. TAFDC, EAEDC and FS recipients received a brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program. This brochure includes an overview of the program and explains how to apply for fuel assistance. It also includes a list of agencies statewide where applications can be filed. The Fuel Assistance brochure tells food stamp benefit recipients that if: 1) they receive food stamps and 2) they receive fuel assistance and 3) their heat is included in their rent, they may be entitled to more food stamp benefits.

TAFDC and EAEDC recipients also received a system-generated notice with verification of their grant amount. Food stamp benefit recipients will receive a system-generated notice confirming the food stamp benefits AU size.

During fuel assistance season (November through April), AU Managers are reminded to ask recipients at every contact, if they receive fuel assistance.

If they receive fuel assistance and food stamp benefits, make sure they are given the heating Standard Utility Allowance, *even if they are not paying heat separately from their rent.*

FYI

New "Benefit Type" for Certain AUs and Display of ESP and Employment Participation Hours Clarification

Two FYIs in September's *Transitions* are being clarified:

New "Benefit Type" for Certain AUs:

Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.20, for former State Food Stamp benefits and the Solely State Funded benefits from April through September 2006, the type will be "State Only."

As of October 1, 2006, the solely state benefits will be displayed as "Solely State" not "State Only" as mentioned in the September FYI.

No AU Manager action is needed.

Display of ESP and Employment Participation Hours:

Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.20, an Hours field has been added to the Work Requirements window. The FYI in September's *Transitions* stated that the Hours field would appear on the Monitor Participation window. Please see "What's New in BEACON 2.1.20" for the new functionality description.

We apologize for any confusion this inaccurate information may have caused.

FYI

Update to the DTA EOHHS Homepage - ESP Component/Activity Descriptions

The DTA Website describing ESP components/activities has been updated to reflect current services offered to applicants and recipients. Also, the activities of "Basic Job Search" and "Structured Job Search" have been replaced with the activity of "Job Search/Job Readiness."

FYI

Voluntary Request to Close Case - Recipient Mailing

The card shown below was mailed to all active TAFDC and EAEDC recipients. It was included in the Fuel Assistance Income Verification Notice and Fuel Assistance brochure mailed to recipients beginning the week of September 18, 2006. A recipient who wants to voluntarily stop his or her benefits may sign and complete the postage-paid card and return it by mail to the Central Office P. O. Box listed on the front of the card, or may mail or give the completed card to his or her AU Manager.

AU Managers who receive a signed Voluntary Request to Close Case card must process the closing using the BEACON closing code "Requested Closure" in the AU Composition Results window, and annotate the BEACON Narratives Tab with the action taken. AU Managers must file the card in the AU record.

A log was e-mailed to TAO
Directors to be annotated
electronically with the AU
Name, SSN, Action Taken, and
Date of Closing. TAO Directors
or their designees should
e-mail completed logs to

Carla Walsh at Central Office on Friday of each week.

Voluntary Request to Close Case cards received at the Central Office P. O. Box will be processed centrally. The action taken will be noted in the BEACON Narratives Tab, and all cards will be forwarded to the appropriate TAO to be filed in the AU records.

For a card that is returned to the Central Office P. O. Box as undeliverable, Central Office staff will close the AU(s) using the BEACON closing reason "Whereabouts unknown: mail returned." A notation will be made in the BEACON Narratives Tab with the action taken. Additionally, an e-mail will be sent to the AU Manager with a cc to the TAO Director alerting both of the action taken. The card will be sent to the TAO to be filed in the AU record.

Department of Transitional Assistance - Voluntary Request to Close Case

We are sending this notice to make sure our records are up to date and accurate. You may have started working and be earning enough to support yourself and your family, or you may have other changes in your circumstances and you no longer need benefits. If so, you may ask us to stop your benefits. If you want to stop your benefits, complete this card. Place an "X" next to the benefits you want stopped, and sign and print your name, address, date, and last four digits of your Social Security Number. Mail the card, or put the card in an envelope and mail it to the address on the card, or give it to your worker. You will receive a notice when your benefits will stop. If you request your TAFDC benefits stopped and you are working, you can receive child care and transportation services. Ask your worker about these benefits. You may continue to receive food stamps and MassHealth, even if you no longer receive TAFDC/EAEDC benefits.

I request that my TAFDC/EAEDC case be stopped.		ed I request that my food s	I request that my food stamp case be stopped.	
Signature		Date		
Print Your Name		Last 4 SSN Digits	The state of the s	
Street Address	City/Town	Zip Code	(VRCC9/06)	
· lui				



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FYI

Work Program Sanction Desk Guide

The Work Program Sanction Desk Guide is a resource document used as a quick reference tool by AU Managers and Supervisors to help manage the work program sanction process. The guide is available on an 11 x 17 blue card stock to be distributed to the local TAOs. It is also in BEACON Online Guides in Policy Online.

The work program sanction process is printed on both sides of the Desk Guide in two different formats: a flowchart and an information detail chart. Both formats show the workflows that occur for:

- "Noncompliance" sanctions when individuals are not fulfilling the work requirements; and
- "Nonparticipation" sanctions when individuals are not meeting their participation requirements.

The guide details the work program sanction workflow for eligible grantees who are at the end of their 60-day work search period. It should be used along with the procedures found in *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIX-D, which has been updated.

AU Managers should continue to use the *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIII, Sections C, G, K, and L, and *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XVI, Section C, for details on how to process all other types of sanctions (teen parent sanctions, and grantees with multiple or other types of sanctions).



