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## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

Governor Patrick announced his House 2 budget for Fiscal Year 2011. As you know, the Patrick Administration remains committed to preserving the safety net for the Commonwealth's poorest residents, and we are pleased to preserve subsistence benefits for thousands of families. These include monthly cash assistance, at current eligibility and benefit levels, for more than 50,000 Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) households and more than 20,000 Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC) households. Services for survivors of domestic violence and the annual clothing allowance for TAFDC families are also protected.

The Commonwealth continues to face economic challenges, and each agency must bear its share. us, FY11 will bring a \$9 million reduction to our Employment Services Program (ESP). In order to allocate this reduction equitably, the Department's approach is to target services to those with the greatest needs and fewest available resources. In addition, some smaller initiatives that supplement existing programs will be eliminated.

As a result, we will be eliminating the Community College "bridge" programs; transportation supports for clients seeking employment or enrolled in an ESP activity; and the "employment ready" and "employment education and training" models (Models I and II) of the recently procured Competitive Integrated Employment Services Program (CIES). In addition, two ESP programs for homeless families (Project SAFE and Project Hope's Hot Jobs) and the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) will no longer be funded by DTA.

The remaining ESP components and activities will face reductions of 5-10%.

Our FY11 budget may also affect our efficiency. Within the last year alone, participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) has increased by 30%. The total number of households on SNAP has increased by over 250% since the beginning of FY02, while total Department staffing levels decreased about 30% in that same time period.

In FY10, the Department received funding through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), also known as the federal economic stimulus, to

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## From the Commissioner (Continued from page 1)

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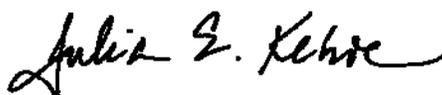
hire caseworkers, interpreters, and clerical employees to help manage the SNAP caseload. The Legislature decreased our FY10 state appropriation for caseworkers under the assumption that the stimulus funding would supplant this reduction. This funding has not been replaced in House 2, which will have a substantial impact on the timely administration of SNAP and other benefits if new federal funding is not available to use for these critical staff. We hope to maintain at least the current level of staff through the state and federal funding sources.

The FY11 budget is not yet final. In the coming months, the budget will move through the House and Senate; the Governor will submit a revised budget; the House and Senate will submit a “conference committee” budget; the Governor will submit his vetoes; and the House and Senate will have the opportunity to override the Governor’s vetoes. During this time, we will develop our plans to implement our reductions. The final FY11 budget will take effect on July 1, 2010. It is our goal to be able to preserve all existing DTA staff positions, which will be crucial as we face continued dramatic caseload growth.

Although employment services, training, and education are critical to assisting families to move out of poverty, maintaining subsistence-level benefits that are already very low must be a priority, particularly since any reduction would not be replaced by assistance from other organizations. We will work to mitigate the impact of these reductions by continuing to work with community partners and the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) to leverage other existing employment, education and training resources for our clients.

Thank you as always for your patience, understanding, and commitment to low-income individuals and families. I will keep you updated on our reductions as the budget process progresses.

With much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe  
Commissioner

## Quality Corner

This month, we will discuss two errors that occurred in Non Public Assistance (NPA) cases. The first error was caused by unreported child support information, while the second error was caused by a failure to follow up on match information.

### Outdated Child Support Verification

The NPA SNAP household included a 48-year-old disabled adult and two children. The only income reported to the Department was a pension of \$2,451 per month. The household was certified for 12 months from March 1, 2009 through February 28, 2010. At recertification, the client informed the case manager that she was not receiving child support.

As a part of the case review, Quality Control determined through a Department of Revenue (DOR) Child Support Inquiry that the client had, in fact, been receiving child support in the amount of \$560 per month since December 2008. As of the QC review date, the household was ineligible for SNAP benefits. The unreported child support payment caused an overpayment error of \$131 for the review month.

### What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must remember to access the DOR Inquiry screen to determine whether or not a client is receiving child support through DOR. Staff must routinely utilize this method to prevent errors.

**Note:** Some clients receive child support payments directly from noncustodial parents; in such instances, the child support payment would not appear on the DOR Inquiry screen.

### Failure to Follow Up on Match Information

This NPA SNAP household included a 55-year-old who lived alone. At the time of certification, the client provided a written statement (self-declaration) as verification of his unemployment. No other proof was provided. The household was certified for 12 months from April 13, 2009 through April 12, 2010. Since the client had no income, he received the maximum allotment of \$200 per month.

QC determined that the client had been working continuously since September 2008. Multiple BEACON matches from the same employer also indicated that the client had been employed. No action was taken on the matches so the error was not detected for several months. Based on the unreported earned income, the household was ineligible for SNAP benefits during the review month. This caused an overissuance of \$200.

### What's a Case Manager to Do?

Sometimes it is difficult for an applicant to verify employment termination. If the client indicated that it would have been difficult or complicated to obtain a termination letter, the case manager should have asked the client to sign a Voluntary Authorization to Release Information form. This form is available on Policy Online under Online Forms. After receiving the client's permission, the case manager should have called the client's former employer to verify the last date worked and last date paid.

This error could have been prevented if the earned income matches had been acted upon promptly. Supervisors and case managers are reminded to follow up on BEACON matches; this significant step is critical to reducing errors.

## From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

- Q.** My client is receiving SNAP benefits. At her recertification, she mentioned that she has not made a mortgage payment in over a year. In recertifying this case on BEACON, can I still deduct her mortgage payment as a shelter expense?
- A.** Yes. As long as your client is still responsible for making the mortgage payments, then they can be deducted as a shelter expense. Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(G) and 106 CMR 364.500(K) for more information on shelter expense deductions.
- Q.** My client is receiving TAFDC payments. She has not paid her mortgage in over a year. Can I deduct income-in-kind from her grant amount?
- A.** No. As long as your TAFDC client is responsible for making mortgage payments, no income-in-kind deduction should be made. This client is eligible for the Rent Allowance of \$40. Refer to 106 CMR 705.910 for more details.
- Q.** While my SNAP client was unemployed, he was not paying his rent. Recently, however, he has secured part-time employment and has started paying his regular monthly rent amount as well as an additional \$20 each month towards his rent arrearage. Can I combine this client's regular monthly obligation with his arrearage payments to determine his shelter expense amount?
- A.** No. These arrearage expenses were already deducted in a previous certification period and cannot be deducted twice.
- Q.** My SNAP client's home is going through foreclosure proceedings and he has secured an attorney for the transaction. Can I deduct the attorney's fees as part of my client's shelter expense, since the attorney wants to maintain home ownership for our client?
- A.** No. Your client's foreclosure proceedings are not part of any "continuing charges" on the home and cannot therefore be included as part of his shelter expense amount. Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(G) for more information on shelter expense deductions.
- Q.** My EAEDC applicant is about to enter a rest home. He is married and co-owns his current residence with his wife. Once my client moves, is his home a countable asset that must be sold, per 106 CMR 321.140(O): "Real estate that is not the principal residence?"
- A.** No. Your client's spouse continues to live at this location and the residence is considered an inaccessible asset, per 106 CMR 321.125. For more information on rest home clients, Living Arrangement E in EAEDC, refer to 106 CMR 321.410.



## Field Operations Memos

### Centralization of the Department of Children and Families Child in Placement Match Process

All

Field Operations 2010-1

DTA performs matches with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), formerly DSS, and receives information for the following matches:

- Child in Placement;
- Child No Longer in Placement;
- Client Deceased; and
- Guardian/Adoption Placement.

The purpose of this memo is to inform TAO staff that case managers will no longer be responsible for the *Child in Placement* match. Effective with the first match received from DCF in late January 2010, Central Office Data Matching Unit staff will be responsible for the *Child in Placement* match.

### ARRA \$25 Weekly Unemployment Compensation Benefit Noncountable for SNAP

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-2

A new federal law enacted on November 6, 2009 changed the treatment of a \$25 weekly ARRA unemployment compensation (UC) payment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The \$25 weekly UC payment is now excluded from the SNAP eligibility calculation but remains countable for TAFDC and EAEDC.

This memo advises TAO staff of BEACON changes and the recalculation of SNAP cases to facilitate the implementation of the new law.

#### Diversity Quote

**“One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings.”**

***Franklin Thomas***



## Field Operations Memos

### **Prefilled SNAP Recertification Forms: Your SNAP Recertification Form and the Updated Food Stamp Semiannual Report**

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-3

In an effort to streamline the SNAP recertification process, the Department has expanded the use of a prefilled recertification form to additional SNAP households. The *Your SNAP Recertification Form*:

- replaces the SNAP application form that was marked R to denote its use as a recertification form;
- replaces the Notice of SNAP Benefit Expiration;
- is prefilled with verified information known to the Department; and
- does not display information on a household member who is active in another SNAP household.

In conjunction with this initiative, the Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) form was updated to further align the USR form with the *Your SNAP Recertification Form*.

### **Medex Premium Rate Changes and Medicare Changes**

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-4

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts has announced Medex premium rate changes for the following non-group plans: Bronze, Core, Core Plus, Gold, Silver, and Standard. These changes were effective on January 1, 2010. This memo:

- identifies the non-group plans that have changed and the corresponding rate changes;
- provides information on updates to SNAP benefits and the Medex premium amounts; and
- gives information about the 2010 Medex Premium Rate Change Report.

**Note:** While there is no SSA COLA this year, the Medicare Part B Premium and Medicare Part D Deductible will also be adjusted with the Medex Premium Rate change.

## Cultural Communication

Each month, the Diversity Council offers tips about communicating with people of different cultures.

This month's tip:

In many Portuguese and Spanish cultures, it is considered insulting to call someone over using the index finger.

## Field Operations Memos

### Work Program Requirement Change Cancellation

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-5

Field Operations Memo 2009-65 A advised TAO staff of an initial mailing to clients about a change to the number of hours per week that a client must work under the work program. This change has been canceled. For clients whose youngest child in the case is mandatory full-time school age through eight years old, the client will continue to be required to participate in the work program for **24 hours per week** until further notice. This memo informs case managers about a follow-up mailing to this population informing clients of the cancellation of this change.

### My Account Page (MAP): Initial Roll-out

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-6

Field Operations Memo 2009-41 advised TAO staff that My Account Page (MAP) was scheduled to be released August 8, 2009. However, there was a delay in the initial roll-out. The new MAP roll-out date was January 25, 2010. The purpose of this memo is to advise TAO staff about MAP and help staff respond to questions concerning MAP.

On January 21, TAO staff was informed that the deployment of MAP had been postponed due to a technical problem. MAP was deployed on February 1, 2010.

### Security Enhancement to the EPPIC System

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-7

The Electronic Payment Processing Information Control System (EPPIC) is the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system through which all SNAP clients and the majority of cash assistance clients access their benefits with the use of an EBT card. Certain DTA employees access EPPIC for a variety of business uses, including but not limited to card issuance, program management, program accounting and client services.

Currently, EPPIC users must call the Help Desk to reset passwords that are lost or forgotten. New functionality was deployed on January 21, 2010 that enables EPPIC users to reset their own passwords once they correctly answer a self-selected secret question.

## Field Operations Memos

### MassHealth Central Filing Unit Initiative

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-8

DTA in partnership with MassHealth is providing our clients opportunities to gain work experience by offering on-the-job training opportunities at MassHealth's Central Filing Unit (CFU) in Taunton. For DTA purposes, this opportunity will be considered an Employment Training and Education activity. This training opportunity is scheduled to begin the week of January 25, 2010. The purpose of this memo is to advise TAO staff about this training opportunity, clients' eligibility to participate in this activity and case manager responsibilities.

### TAOs as Community Service Sites

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-9

DTA recognizes our role in increasing economic opportunity for the clients we serve to help them become self-sufficient. As a result, DTA will offer clients an opportunity that serves a useful community purpose with a goal of improving clients' employability.

The availability of additional resources, through the presence of community service program participants in local offices, will provide valuable customer service assistance and increase access to DTA's programs and services. This memo advises TAO staff of:

- the population best served by this community service activity;
- the suggested duties of clients enrolled in the community service activity;
- the process for referring clients to the community service activity at the TAO; and
- the CORI process for interested clients.

### DTA Works Program Reinstated

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-10

Field Operations Memo 2009-21 informed TAO staff that the DTA Works Program was temporarily suspended effective June 30, 2009. DTA Works is now being reinstated effective February 1, 2010. The purpose of this Field Operations Memo is to reinstate the DTA Works Program and to inform TAO staff:

- about the DTA Works Program; and
- about the Intern Supervisor's and case manager's responsibilities.

## Field Operations Memos

### **BEACON 3.0 User Acceptance Testing (UAT)**

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-11

In preparation for implementation of BEACON 3.0, the Department is conducting User Acceptance Testing (UAT) to test the typical transactions encountered by DTA field and Central Office users. The testing covers those activities that have been transitioned from BEACON 2.0 to BEACON 3. Additional guidance will be forthcoming.

### **TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP – Massachusetts Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) Screen Guide**

All

Field Operations Memo 2010-13

The purpose of this Field Operations Memo is to provide TAO staff with a guide to help identify and define the fields on the updated DUA screen.

## FYI

### Getting Ready for BEACON 3

Development of BEACON 3.0 is ongoing. This column will continue to appear in future *Transitions* so that you will be up-to-date on significant project milestones.

User Acceptance Testing (UAT) for BEACON 3.0 has begun and is expected to continue for the next few weeks. UAT teams are continuing to report any issues, and where issues are reported, they are being researched for resolution.

A decision regarding the BEACON 3.0 “go live” date will be finalized in the near future.

#### BEACON 3.0 Implementation

Scheduled live production of BEACON 3.0 will begin in the near future. To prepare for this transition, be sure to watch for upcoming communications about the implementation schedule.

### The Need for SNAP Application and Recertification Interviews

Case managers are reminded that an interview must be conducted for all SNAP applications and all recertifications unless a recertifying elderly/disabled household meets all the criteria for the waiver of the interview, as described in Field Operations Memo 2009-64A. Unless an exception as described in Field Operations Memo 2009-63A, *SNAP: Modifications to the Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview*, exists, interviews must be conducted by telephone.

Additionally, applications cannot be denied with the reason “Failed to provide verifications” unless an interview has taken place. Applicant households that do not complete an interview must be denied using the reason “Failed to complete the application process.” Case managers must ensure that the case record contains a BEACON-generated appointment letter and BEACON-generated Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) before denying for this reason. Denying a case without a scheduled interview (and NOMI, if required) constitutes a negative error.

Initiated recertifications that do not complete an interview must be closed using the reason “Failed to keep appointment for review.” As with applications, there must be proof in the case record that an interview was scheduled and that a NOMI was sent when the interview was missed. Because BEACON has not been programmed to send a NOMI for **active** cases, case managers must complete a manual NOMI (FS-NOMI form) to send to the client if a recertification interview was missed, annotate the BEACON Narrative tab that the manual NOMI has been sent and place a copy of the NOMI in the case record.

More details can be found in Field Operations Memo 2006-30, *FS (NPA and PA) Application Processing Guidelines*, Field Operations Memo 2007-16, *BEACON-Generated Food Stamp Application Appointment Letters and the Food Stamp Notice of Missed Interview*, Field Operations Memo 2007-39, *Food Stamp Program: Negative Errors*, and Field Operations Memo 2008-59, *SNAP Negative Errors and Application Processing*.

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## TAO Meeting Notes