

Chelsea DTA Advisory Board

July 12, 2021

Amy Kershaw, Commissioner
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111

Dear Commissioner Kershaw,

As the Chelsea DTA Advisory Board is not currently scheduled to convene again until August 20, 2021, **we write now to offer our support for the Boston/Quincy DTA Advisory Board's stated and urgent concerns that the planned DTA office reopening will not adequately serve DTA's most vulnerable clients.** We share the Boston/Quincy Board's fear that the proposed limited in-person access to DTA workers will curtail consumers from accessing essential services, furthering barriers for those who have most struggled to reach DTA in the past year and a half while offices have been physically closed.

It is precisely because of the challenges certain consumers face applying for and resolving SNAP and cash issues online and on the phone that in-person services are required. It is especially critical that immigrants/non-English speakers, and those individuals and families without an address have full access to in-person DTA services. Further, we believe that DTA's very limited reopening of local TAO offices is not consistent with the Governor's lifting of the broad public health emergency declaration.

We are also deeply troubled by DTA's plan to no longer provide EBT cards to those who qualify and apply in-person at local offices except in "dire" circumstances. The criteria for what circumstances workers will consider sufficiently "dire" is unclear and honestly, we feel strongly that anyone seeking food assistance from DTA is in a "dire" circumstance. Overall, we fear the reopening policies as they currently stand roll back the Department's many recent and significant improvements in customer service and access, all of which we have touted for ensuring that clients feel dignified and respected while receiving the urgent help they need to try to meet their basic needs.

We have so appreciated your many efforts to provide efficient and accessible remote services during the pandemic, which undoubtedly saved lives. But the time has now come to safely return to providing in-person services for those who most need DTA's services. We also ask that DTA collect specific data on the reasons clients seek in-person services so you can adjust access to services and protocols to best meet those specific needs.

We look forward to hearing from you soon regarding these urgent concerns, and continuing our work together on behalf of our clients.

Sincerely,

Rachel Kinney and Lee Erica Palmer, Chelsea DTA Advisory Board Co-Chairs