

Transitions

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this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

The close of this year seems a fitting time to restate my commitment to reinforcing staff and resources in our local Transitional Assistance offices (TAOs). The year 2003 has been a challenging one, and, in looking back, it is clear that this year and the last few months in particular have demanded a great deal of resilience from all of us. As many of you know, the recent Early Retirement Program imposes restrictions on the number of staff who may be rehired. Nevertheless, as many of you are also aware, I am continuing my work towards bringing additional resources back to the agency, whenever possible.

The results of these efforts are encouraging. As of this date, fifty employees are being recalled to return to work in our local TAOs. Specifically, three clerical employees and 47 BERS staff will be returning to local offices. We anticipate their return will be phased in over the next couple of months, and we hope to have the majority of rehires returning by the end of this year. For many of us, the return of these employees is a welcomed holiday present.

Added to this, I am proud of our end-of-the-year accomplishments. As a result of your diligence, this year we have seen our food stamp participation rate increase by 26 percent, the number of TAFDC families entering into work and training-related activities increase by 20 percent, and education and training choices offered to TAFDC families expanded. The news on our food stamp error rate is also positive. Compared to last year, our food stamp error rate has improved by over 40 percent. Nationally, this number represents the third largest decline in food stamp errors. Reflecting on these achievements, I am reminded of the fact that the work we perform each day is crucial. Without these efforts, the less

From the Hotline

In response to recent quality control errors, the questions below concern homeless, food stamp recipients and how to accurately process their food stamp benefits on BEACON.

Q. Last week, a food stamp recipient came into our office and reported that she is homeless and temporarily living in a shelter with her daughter. She is not paying rent or utilities. How do I accurately enter this information on BEACON?

A. At the Address window, click on the homeless indicator box and a check mark will appear. Although *None* should be indicated for “permanent address,” a mailing address must be entered.

When a food stamp AU is homeless and has no shelter expenses, BEACON will use the \$143 FS Homeless Shelter/Expense Deduction amount, but this will occur only if the homeless indicator is checked.

Refer to *A User’s Guide, Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter IV, page A-5 and Chapter V, page 5 for more details.

Q. This week, the same recipient described in the question above returned to our office and reported that she is staying temporarily with her friend. Her completed Shared Housing Verification form shows that she is planning to pay \$300 per month in rent plus a separate charge for heat. How do I indicate these changes on BEACON, and how does this affect my recipient’s food stamp benefit calculation?

A. Food stamp regulations still consider this a homeless AU and allow homeless recipients who are staying in temporary situations to use their actual shelter expenses if it means that the shelter deduction is going to be greater than the standard \$143 amount. Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(F)(2).

On BEACON, make sure that the homeless indicator remains checked and enter the new mailing address. Also, since the AU has shelter and utility expenses that exceed the \$143 amount, enter actual expenses on BEACON.

BEACON is programmed to compare the \$143 Homeless Shelter/Expense Deduction to the calculated Excess Shelter Deduction amount using actual expenses. The system will use the higher deduction in the food stamp benefit calculation.

Q. One of my homeless food stamp recipients is temporarily staying with his cousin and pays only a total of \$30 for phone and rent each month. I entered this information on BEACON but BEACON continues to allow the \$143 Homeless Shelter/Expense deduction? Is this correct?

A. Yes. BEACON appropriately allowed this deduction. The Homeless Shelter/Expense deduction of \$143 was greater than the actual shelter deduction. BEACON is designed to use the higher deduction amount.

Q. What do I do when this food stamp recipient finds a more permanent address?

A. Once the recipient finds a more permanent address, enter the new address and be sure to click on the homeless indicator to *remove* the check mark on BEACON. Failure to do so could result in an error as the \$143 Homeless Shelter/Expense deduction could continue to be used incorrectly.



ESP Transportation Services - TAFDC

TAFDC
State Letter 1267
Field Operations Memo
2003-32 B

State Letter 1267 transmits the following changes to the TAFDC Program:

- The total transportation payment provided to an ESP participant for allowable transportation costs shall not exceed \$60 per month of verified participation.
- A transportation payment provided to an ESP participant whose ESP education and training activity has lasted beyond the end of the 24-month time-limited benefits period shall last no longer than 60 days beyond the end of the 24-month time-limited benefits period.

Field Operations Memo 2003-32B (which obsoletes Field Operations Memos 2003-32 and 2003-32A) reinstates referrals to TransAction Associates for Transportation Services. It provides information about services provided by TransAction Associates to TAFDC recipients and former recipients and gives AU Managers procedures to make those referrals.

Continued from Page 1

fortunate in our Commonwealth might not otherwise find the resources to prevent homelessness, purchase nutritious meals or provide the essentials for their families.

Recently, I visited the Springfield State and Springfield Liberty offices. During my visits, I was struck by your continuing commitment to high standards and the care with which you conduct your work. Moving beyond the basics of performing the required tasks, many of you have invigorating ideas on how to improve the way we do our jobs. Whenever possible, I will try to implement these ideas. I appreciate recommendations that make our agency more effective and efficient, and I look forward to continuing this dialogue with you in 2004.

In closing, I want to wish you and your families the most joyous of holiday seasons and a Happy New Year.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY



From the Forms File

Revised Forms

AU Managers must discard the old version of any form and use the new version.

25-150-1103-05

TABA-1 (Rev. 11/2003)

Application for Transitional Assistance Benefits

09-150-1103-05

SSI/FSP-1 (Rev. 11/2003)

SSI Food Stamp Benefits Reapplication Form

25-170-1103-05

25-171-1103-05(S)

FSA-1 (Rev. 11/2003)

Food Stamp Benefits Application

09-181-1103-05

09-182-1103-05(S)

Food Stamp Benefits Recertification for Universal Semiannual Reporting Households

These revised paper applications now include two new paragraphs and additional text on the signature page. The first paragraph informs recipients that only verified expenses (e.g. child care, mortgage, utility, shelter, etc.) can be used to determine their correct food stamp benefits. The second paragraph tells recipients that all household members between the ages of 16 and 60 are automatically work registered and enrolled in the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program (FS/E&T). The additional text allows DTA to contact local housing authorities for information about recipients. Please discard any old versions of these forms and use the revised versions. The BEACON generated signature pages will be modified to reflect these changes in the future.

The following forms are now available in Spanish.

13-161-1003-05 (S)

EA-15 (Rev. 11/2003)

EA Self-Sufficiency Plan/Agreement – Phase 1 GOAL: To Obtain Permanent Housing

13-151-1003-05 (S)

EA-Plan/PT 1 (Rev. 11/2003)

EA Self-Sufficiency Plan – Phase II – Part 1

09-376-1103-05

FS-USR-2 (S) (Rev. 11/2003)

Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

Revised Brochure

The following brochure is now available in Spanish.

09-079-1103-05

FSP-INFO (S) (Rev. 11/2003)

How to Get Food Stamp Benefits



Cash and Food Stamp Programs - Fees for Replacement Identification Cards

FS, TAFDC, EAEDC
State Letter 1266

This State Letter transmits the following change to both the cash and food stamp programs.

Chargeable replacement EBT cards can be paid for only by cash or food stamp debit through EBT. Checks and money orders will no longer be accepted as a form of payment.

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FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

Reference Documentation Window

- The Quincy Regional SSI TAO and the Quincy TAO have closed.

The Malden Regional SSI TAO is now responsible for the AUs previously assigned to the Quincy Regional SSI TAO.

The Dorchester TAO, Newmarket TAO, Plymouth TAO and Brockton TAO are now responsible for certain AUs previously assigned to the Quincy TAO.

- The Falmouth TAO no longer services AUs residing in Mashpee, Forestdale and Sandwich.

The Hyannis TAO is now responsible for the AUs residing in Mashpee, Forestdale and Sandwich.

The following options listed on the Reference Documentation window have been updated to reflect these changes:

- Region Number/TAO Number/TAO Name Listing
- Service Area Listing – City/Town
- Service Area Listing – TAO
- SSI Regional Office Listing – City/Town
- SSI Regional Office Listing – TAO

“If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person. If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house. If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.”

Chinese Proverb



FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised. Also, more links have been added to the “How To” procedure windows that will return the user to the specific main window. In the future, all “How To” windows will contain a link to their main window.

Added:

Process an Asset Question
Process an Income and Expenses Question

Revised:

Address
Application
Appointment Book
Appointment Search
APs Not Meeting Work Program Requirements
Assets Q & A Navigator
AU Composition Results
AU Composition Results Tab
Benefit Issuance Mechanism
Client List
Completed Referrals
Document Preview Window
EA AUs in Shelters Within Last Two Months
EDP Approval
ESP Component Eligibility
Income & Expenses Q & A Navigator
How To
Mandated TEMP Site Referral Required
Other Income Status
Process an EDP Approval
Quick Reference Guide for ESP Component Activity Referral and Enrollment
Reevaluation
Reevaluation Due
Reevaluation in Progress
Referrals Tab

Reinstate a Client Closed
 Within 30 Days
Residential Facility
Results Tab
Schedule an Appointment
Schedule a New Appointment
Searching for an Address
Transportation Plan
Verification Tab



FYI

Changes to the Department's Website Home Page

The following enhancements have been added to the Department's Internet home page. This page is accessed from the Mass.Gov home page.

- Requests are often received from individuals outside the Department for copies of the text of draft regulations associated with a legal notice. A link has been added connecting the policy citation stated in the legal notice summary to the text of the draft regulations, enabling users to view the text of the draft regulations online.
- Information about access to the Food Stamp Application online and a link to both the English and Spanish versions of the application have been added to the following sections:
 - Frequently Asked Questions: How Do I Apply for Food Stamp Benefits?
 - Programs: Food Stamp Benefits
 - Other Services: Food Stamp Benefits

FYI

TAFDC Nonpresumptive Disability Exemptions

AU Managers are reminded that when recipients request a second or subsequent disability exemption they remain a nonexempt TAFDC AP until DES determines if they are disabled or not.

If DES determines that the nonexempt recipient is disabled, the Disability Liaison must:

- update the Disability window with the Approval Information, Disposition Date, Expiration Date and Disposition Reason.

Then the AU Manager must:

- update the Disability window with the Determination Source;
- update the Work Requirements window by going to the TAFDC tab and changing the Work Program Required radio button to "No," changing the Required Status Reason to the appropriate reason, updating the Start Date with either the disability onset date (determined by DES) or the date the recipient requested the disability exemption, whichever is later; and,
- on the AU Exemption tab, change the AU Status from Nonexempt to Exempt.

The system will automatically adjust the 24-month clock, recalculate the grant and issue a retroactive payment. If the retroactive payment exceeds the amount of six pay periods or \$1500, a message will appear on the 1070 Errors Report on View Direct, informing the AU Manager to issue the retroactive payment.

In a two-parent AU, the AU Manager must manually:

- adjust the 24-month clock of the disabled recipient if he or she is the other parent in the two-parent AU; and
- calculate and issue a retroactive payment if the two-parent AU goes from a nonexempt to an exempt status. If the two-parent AU remains nonexempt, no retroactive payment is owed.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two household composition problems that have been recurring. One involves retroactive benefits and the other a case that re-opened. See 106 CMR 366.120.

Retroactive Benefits

A woman was receiving both TAFDC and food stamps for herself and her three children. Her spouse, who had been living apart and receiving both EAEDC and food stamps, returned to the family. His cases were closed the previous month, and he was added to his wife's TAFDC budget for the review month. The TAFDC check was increased and a retroactive benefit was issued. The food stamps, however, were not adjusted: the spouse was not added to the FS household, and no supplemental issuance was provided for the review month.

What Can the AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager should have added the husband to the FS AU when he was added to the TAFDC AU. Be sure to check that new household members are added to all assistance programs. The AU Manager should have then issued a supplemental FS benefit back to the date that the husband's FS case closed. Although BEACON automatically issued a retroactive payment for the TAFDC AU; BEACON is not programmed to automatically issue supplemental FS benefits.

Re-opened Case

An NPA case closed, and a month later the recipient re-applied. On her application, she listed four children, but she did not include a 13-year-old who had been listed on all previous applications. She signed the application, and the case was processed with four dependents in the food stamps household. In fact, the 13-year-old was still in the home, and the recipient inadvertently left her off the application, causing an underissuance in the case.

What Can the AU Manager Do?

Even though this was reported as a client error, it could have been prevented if the AU Manager had reviewed the previous case information and noticed that there were fewer household members. If the AU Manager had asked about this discrepancy, the problem would have been immediately resolved and an error avoided.

Avoiding Household Composition Errors for Review Months

In both of these situations an AU composition error occurred due to failure to add an AU member. In the QC world, these months are considered underissuances regardless of whether or not the client reported the correct number of AU members in a timely manner. To reduce the likelihood that such failures will result in a QC error, the AU Manager can issue a supplemental food stamp benefit for the current month when the error is identified.

Example: Jane Smith reports that her 20-year-old daughter returned home "two months ago" and she would like her added to the AU. The addition of the daughter results in a \$64 FS increase. The AU Manager is required by policy to ensure that the AU receives the \$64 no later than the next cyclical month. (If the cyclical benefit has been released, a \$64 supplemental benefit must be issued.) In addition to correcting future months, the AU Manager may opt to issue a \$64 supplemental payment for the current month to avoid an underissuance due to client error if the case is later selected in a QC review.

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TAFDC Exemption and Noncountable Income Clarification

TAFDC
State Letter 1268

This State Letter transmits the following changes.

Two clarifications have been made to 106 CMR 203.100 (A)(1)(d) which deal with a grantee whose youngest child is living in the home and is under age two. They are:

- The part of the exemption has been removed that dealt with a child not in the AU because the child is the grantee's natural or adoptive child and was born before the Family Cap date. This is because a subsequent regulation change requires the dependent child to be in the AU.
- Language has been added to clarify that a grantee is exempt, when the youngest child in the home is under age two and is not in the AU because the child is provided with a state and/or foster care maintenance payment or is provided with state and/or federal adoption assistance.

Veterans Benefits Payments to a female Vietnam veteran made on behalf of her natural or adoptive dependent child with birth defects or spina bifida have been added to the types of Noncountable Income listed at 106 CMR 204.250.

Season's Greetings

from

Policy,

Procedure

and

Program

Management

