



Dear Fellow Employees,

“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.”

Anais Nin



I wanted to share with you some of the background information on a debate that has played out—and will continue to play out—in the public regarding welfare reform. You know more than most that Massachusetts is the second to last state in the country still operating under a federal welfare waiver (ours expires in 2005; Tennessee’s expires in 2007). Given this situation and the fact that the federal government has been debating changing the program that provides our TANF block grant, I invited the United Way of Massachusetts to co-chair a Welfare Reform Advisory Committee (WRAC) with DTA. Assistant Commissioner Ed Sanders-Bey was the co-chair representing DTA. The WRAC was charged with crafting recommendations for our consideration as we figure out what should replace our program once our waiver expires.

The Committee consisted of representatives from over 15 entities, including advocates, providers, and even a private employer. Convened in August, it met over the subsequent two months. It submitted a final report to me on November 5, 2004.

As is the case with any disparate group convened to come to some consensus, my understanding is the meetings were lively and spirited. No one got 100% of what they wanted. But in the end, the Committee came out with a number of recommendations that seem sound and insightful given the changes that lay ahead for the agency, the Commonwealth, and the TAFDC families we serve.

Perhaps the most important recommendation was a belief that the Department should implement something called universal or full engagement. This is a practice discussed at the federal level and incorporates the view that all recipients of TAFDC, including those currently exempt, be “engaged” in productive activities that address their barriers to work and economic independence. In fact, this seems the practice by many of our sister state agencies that serve various populations with disabilities each and every day. To quote a portion of our mission, this is an important part of what we do to “serve the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable families...in a way that promotes [all] clients’ independence and long-term self-sufficiency.”

There are many other recommendations, including some suggestions for streamlining the program, increasing administrative efficiency, requiring 34 hours of work (24 being met by “core” activities and 10 by “other” activities), and ensuring appropriate supports are available for those who need them to succeed in the world of work. You can view the full report on our website at www.mass.gov/dta.

I believe this discussion is a natural progression of the successes you have ensured in implementing the welfare reforms rolled out in the mid-1990s. Because of these successes, we are asking what can be done to continue our mission to maximize our clients’ independence and focus on ability rather than disability. Although this debate is far from over, I wanted to make sure you knew about it.

In closing, I of course want to take this opportunity to thank you for all you have done over the past year to make me proud to be a DTA employee. I wish you and your family the best over the upcoming holiday season.

Sincerely,

John Wagner, Commissioner

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There is no *From the Forms File* this month.

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- Q.** Although the cooler months are here, I am still recertifying AUs using the Heating/Cooling SUA even though many of my recipients are not currently paying for any heating or cooling costs. If my recipient normally pays for cooling costs during the spring and summer months but has neither heating nor cooling expenses during the winter, is he still entitled to Heating/Cooling SUA when his 12- month certification period ends this month?
- A.** Yes. SUAs are yearly amounts. Although your recipient is not currently paying any heating or cooling costs, it would be appropriate to use the Heating/Cooling SUA as long as cooling is a regular, recurring expense in the spring and summer months.
- Q.** A food stamp AU lives in a subsidized housing unit. Currently, all of their expenses are included in the rent and the AU has not had an SUA deduction. However, starting in the spring our local housing authority began billing the AU an additional \$17.00 per month for use of an air conditioner. The AU received their last bill for air conditioner usage in October. Is the AU eligible for the Heating/Cooling SUA because it incurs an extra charge for the use of an air conditioner?
- A.** Yes. This AU is eligible for the Heating/Cooling SUA not only during the summer months, but throughout the year. SUAs are yearly amounts. Although this AU will not be paying cooling costs over the next several months, it is appropriate to use the Heating/Cooling SUA as long as the cooling is a regular, recurring expense.
- Q.** Is a food stamp AU's eligibility for the Heating/Cooling SUA based on: a) *eligibility* for the LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance Program b) actual *receipt* of a LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance payment; or c) the *authorization* of a LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance payment?
- A.** Eligibility for the Heating/Cooling SUA is based on the receipt of a LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance payment, either already or reasonably anticipated to be received. If a LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance payment has been authorized, the AU Manager can anticipate with reasonable certainty that it will be received.

Note: AUs that have their utilities included in their rent may receive a LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance payment.

- Q.** What is considered "reasonable anticipation" of receipt of LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance?
- A.** "Reasonable anticipation" of receipt of LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance must be determined on an individual household basis. There are some guidelines that may be used. For example, if a food stamp AU received LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance during the previous heating season and anticipates applying again and LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance funds are available, it is likely that a LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance payment will be received and the AU would then be entitled to the Heating/Cooling SUA. Provider agencies for the LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance payment are the best source of information if receipt of LIHEAA/Fuel Assistance funds is questionable.

More information on the SUA topic is located in *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIV, pages I-4 through I-6 as well as in 106 CMR 364.400 (G).

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This month we will discuss two shelter/SUA errors (one associated with Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) and one direct child support error. Each could have been prevented.

Case # 1: Shelter/SUA Problems

On her application the applicant listed her shelter expenses as a mortgage of \$789 with additional expenses for insurance and utilities, including heat. The head of the household also reported receiving both child support and SSI income. Finally, there was a notation on the application that someone else pays the mortgage. There was no mortgage verification in the AU record. Quality Control determined that the recipient's ex-husband paid the mortgage and was listed as the sole owner of the house. The AU Manager should have questioned the recipient about the statement on the application that someone else paid the mortgage to determine if she was entitled to the mortgage payment as a deduction.

What can an AU Manager do?

The AU Manager should have noted the statement on the application that the recipient did not pay the mortgage. Food Stamp regulations at 106 CMR 363.220 (C)(3) should be referenced and applied appropriately. This section details the treatment of payments such a mortgage being paid by a former spouse. The critical information would be whether or not the payment is legally obligated.

Case # 2: More Shelter/SUA Problems

In the second case, the AU had income of TAFDC and SSI. Shelter expenses were rent and telephone only, according to the recipient's statement and the most recent landlord verification form. During the Quality Control interview, the recipient stated that she had received a fuel assistance (LIHEEA) payment this past year. In fact, she had been receiving fuel assistance for the last few years that she had not reported.

What can an AU Manager do?

The AU Manager should question the recipient during the recertification about any fuel assistance received, even if the recipient indicates that he or she does not pay for heat. Since the November 2003 revision of the Food Stamp Application clearly stipulates that no deductions will be allowed for expenses that are not claimed and verified, the AU would not have been in error. However this rule was not effective at the time she was last recertified, so the AU was entitled to the heating /cooling standard heating allowance of \$425 and since she receives LIHEEA payments.


Case # 3: Child Support Directly from DOR

In a recent TAFDC AU whose FS recertification was overdue, the case record shows that at the last recertification (14 months earlier), the recipient reported that she was receiving child support from the absent parent of a Family Cap child. According to DOR, this ended two months prior to the review date. Since the recertification, the recipient had also moved and her heating expenses had changed. These changes combined to result in a large QC error.

What can an AU Manager do?

When conducting an application or recertification, the AU Manager should remind recipients to report changes based on the type of reporting requirements the AU is subject to. It is also critical to review the DOR screens for all NPA FS AUs, and PA FS AUs with a Family Cap child. Because Family cap children do not receive TAFDC, they are more likely to receive child support payments directly from DOR. Avoiding overdue recertifications also avoids errors; an AU's circumstances may change during the course of a year and Quality Control loses some flexibility in determining eligibility once the certification period is expired.

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Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program

FS

[Field Operations Memo 2004-43](#)

This Field Operations Memo outlines procedures for implementing the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program for participating FS AUs. The memo describes the BEACON changes for entering the dollar value of the discount and subsidy as an allowable medical expense deduction.

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TAFDC: Change to the ESP Referral and Response Form

TAFDC

[Field Operations Memo 2004-42](#)

ESP vendors need to know the number of hours a recipient is required to meet the Work Program requirement. This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff that effective immediately, the AU Manager must print the number of hours the recipient is Work Program required at the bottom of the first page until a change is made to BEACON.

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TAFDC: ESP Transportation Change: Employed Recipients

TAFDC

[Field Operations Memo 2004-44](#)

The Department has revised its eligibility requirement for ESP Transportation payments for employed current and former recipients.

A recipient or former recipient who is working at least **20** hours per week is eligible to receive transportation payments.

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Technical Corrections to the Food Stamp Program

FS

[State Letter 1288](#)

State Letter 1288 transmits the following technical corrections to food stamp regulations:

1. Mandatory Change Reporting AUs must report a change in residence that results in any change in shelter expenses. The previous regulations required only a change in residence resulting in an increase in shelter expenses be reported.
2. Noncategorically eligible FS AUs that include an elderly or disabled AU member are subject to a \$3,000 asset limit.

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Transportation to Shelters

EA

[EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits and BEACON: Update 020](#)

Emergency Assistance User's Guide Update 020 reissues pages to correct pagination.

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