

**Charles D. Baker**  
Governor

**Karyn Polito**  
Lieutenant Governor



**Marylou Sudders**  
Secretary

**Amy Kershaw**  
Commissioner

# Annual Department of Transitional Assistance Organizational Report

**November 2020**



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NOVEMBER 2020

## **OVERVIEW**

Section 10 of Chapter 10 of the Massachusetts General Laws requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to submit a report annually that contains a description of the organization of the department and a review of the work of the agency.

## **AGENCY MISSION**

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports.

## **PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED**

DTA administers four primary programs that receive both state and federal funding, which aim to meet the agency's mission. In addition to administering these programs, DTA provides rigorous oversight and special attention to eligibility standards and compliance for each program. DTA uses advanced analytics and a variety of fraud detection practices to promote programmatic integrity.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)**

SNAP benefits help families supplement their food budgets to afford nutritious food. Residents of the Commonwealth who participate in SNAP include families with children, elders, and persons with disabilities. While administered by DTA, SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded and regulated. The Commonwealth is responsible for 50% of the costs to administer the program.

Beyond the core responsibilities in administering the SNAP program, DTA works alongside a variety of partners contributing to the mission of food security in the Commonwealth.

### **TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN (TAFDC)**

TAFDC is a state and federally funded program that provides financial assistance to families with children, and pregnant women, with little or no assets or income. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Participants receive child care and transportation supports associated with job assistance and can access various supportive referrals. As a part of TAFDC, participants may be required to perform a work-related activity as a condition of eligibility.

### **EMERGENCY AID TO THE ELDERLY, DISABLED, AND CHILDREN (EAEDC)**

EAEDC is a state funded program, which provides financial assistance to certain adults who are elderly or disabled, as well as children. Those eligible for EAEDC include people over 65 who are waiting for Supplemental Security Income payments to begin, individuals unable to work due to a physical or mental incapacity, and individuals who are participating in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission program.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) AND STATE SUPPLEMENTAL PAYMENTS (SSP)**

The SSI program is a federal program that provides cash assistance to the elderly, disabled, and blind. Massachusetts provides optional state-funded supplemental payments designed to supplement these funds. DTA funds SSP for elderly, disabled, and blind recipients. Currently, the University of Massachusetts Medical School administers SSP payments for DTA.

### **AGENCY STAFFING**

As of today, DTA employs approximately 1,644 civil servants across the Commonwealth in the areas of programs, policy, and management. DTA staff have a range of responsibilities from benefit eligibility, employment and training assistance, program integrity, legal, finance, policy development, and fair hearings. 1,331 DTA employees, or more than 80% of the department's active employees, are deployed in one of our 22 local transitional assistance offices across the Commonwealth.

Currently, the Department's SNAP workforce, serving the largest caseload of the agency's primary programs, consists of 672 employees, including 529 caseworkers and 143 supervisors.

The Department's economic assistance workforce includes 325 DTA staff members serving clients who receive TAFDC and EAEDC. This includes 180 TAFDC caseworkers, 63 EAEDC caseworkers, and 82 supervisors, all of whom provide direct case management.

In addition to DTA's case management workforce, our local transitional assistance offices have been staffed by 295 employees who serve in managerial roles, provide administrative assistance, or offer intensive, targeted client supports including Domestic Violence Specialists, Self-Sufficiency Specialists, and Full Engagement Workers.

### **ORGANIZATION OF DTA**

DTA is organized into 22 local transitional assistance offices and one central office. Transitional assistance offices are responsible for providing direct services to clients and those seeking assistance throughout the Commonwealth. The agency's central office houses the Office of the Commissioner, senior management, program integrity, and other administrative units.

Included in this report is an organizational chart of DTA's Central Office and a leadership chart of the Department's 22 local transitional assistance offices.

### **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DTA OPERATIONS AND PROGRAMS**

Since March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has touched every corner of the Commonwealth, impacting many families' and individuals' financial stability, and, in many cases, exacerbating existing inequities in economic opportunity and food insecurity. The widespread public health and economic impacts associated with the pandemic led to a significant increase in demand for DTA's supports and services, leading to historic caseload increases across SNAP, TAFDC, and EAEDC.

DTA's response to the impacts of the pandemic has been focused on ensuring stability in benefits for existing clients and timely application processing for newly eligible families. In working towards these goals, the agency initiated significant operational changes, introduced new ways for clients to do business with the agency, implemented critical supplemental programs, and pursued administrative flexibilities to streamline the agency's ability to process cases.

In mid-March, DTA's 22 local transitional assistance offices were closed to in-person services to promote the wellness of the agency's clients and staff. By the end of April, DTA provided its entire caseworker workforce with equipment, training, and technical support to fully transition to teleworking schedules, with more than 1,000 laptops and cell phones deployed to field staff to support their remote work.

The Department worked quickly to implement policy and technological enhancements to move core, in-person services to telephonic and digital service delivery models, including introducing the ability to request replacement EBT cards through the DTA Assistance Line and apply for TAFDC and EAEDC on the agency's online client-facing portal, DTACconnect.com. In the face of significant delays at the postal service, the agency stood up a local EBT card printing operation to reduce the time it would take for families to be able to access their benefits. To keep clients as informed as possible about their case status with the agency, DTA introduced a proactive client communication option where the agency can provide applicants and clients with important updates and information about their case via text message and email.

In addition to its core programming, the Department has implemented new, federally approved programs, and invested in existing programs that have provided critical additional benefits to families throughout the pandemic. To support families whose children were unable to receive free or reduced priced school meals as a result of school closures in the spring and again in September, Massachusetts was one of the first states in the country to implement federal Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT. This program has provided direct financial assistance to the families of more than 550,000 students and has injected more than \$250 million into the state's economy.

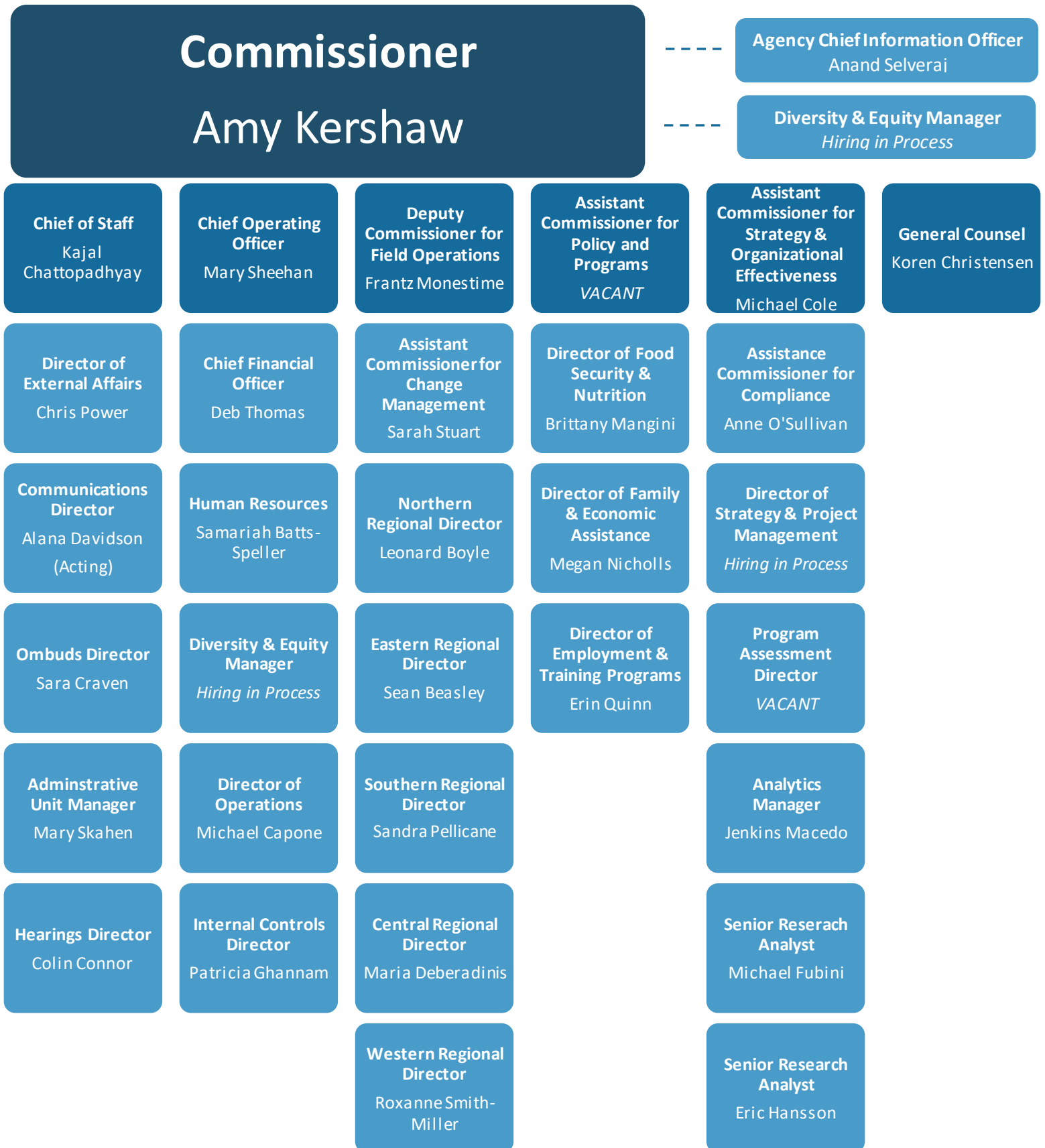
Since March, DTA received federal approval to issue additional SNAP benefits to families not already receiving the maximum benefit amount for their household size, bringing another \$290 million in federal funding into the state's economy. In May, DTA introduced an online EBT purchasing option in the state, providing equitable access to online purchasing with curbside and delivery options that previously did not exist for SNAP clients. To date, clients have purchased more than \$13 million of eligible foods. In recognition of the important role that local farmers play in the state's food system, the Baker-Polito Administration announced a \$5 million investment in the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which allowed for the strategic onboarding of 39 new vendors that serve vulnerable populations and previously underserved communities. These vendors joined nearly 200 existing vendors, many of whom developed creative, low-contact methods to connect families in need with fresh, local produce.

In March and April, DTA experienced a significant increase in applications for SNAP, as well as the agency's economic assistance programs. At the peak, weekly SNAP applications increased by 360% over the average weekly SNAP applications prior to COVID-19. SNAP applications increased again

in August as a result of the expiration of federal pandemic unemployment compensation at the end of July. Prior to the pandemic, the state's SNAP caseload had been stable at around 450,000 households. As of October 23, 2020, 506,214 households were receiving SNAP, while 26,971 households were receiving TAFDC benefits and 19,425 households were receiving EAEDC benefits.

DTA continues to operate remotely in response to the pandemic and support families and individuals across the Commonwealth as they navigate the impacts of the public health crisis. To help address the increased demand for DTA services, the Department promoted 59 existing clerical staff to become SNAP Workers. Training for these new workers begins in November. Additional administrative flexibilities and program extensions afforded by a recently approved federal Continuing Appropriations Act are under consideration between the Department and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Moving forward, the Department intends to leverage the innovations and new practices that have been successful in response to the pandemic and have contributed to efficiencies and improved access for clients, including expanding the agency's digital footprint and integrating opportunities for telework and remote services.

## DTA ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



## TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE OFFICE LEADERSHIP CHART

Central Region	Eastern Region	Northern Region	Southern Region	Western Region
<b>Fitchburg Center</b> Jennifer Tait	<b>Brockton</b> Sarah Maloney	<b>Chelsea Center</b> Lucia Tramontozzi	<b>Fall River</b> Melissa Zeitz	<b>Greenfield</b> Zoy Soulis
<b>Framingham</b> Lina Stolnik-Yoffe	<b>Dudley Square</b> Neycole Howell	<b>Lawrence</b> Elaine DeVito	<b>Hyannis</b> Peter Danzell	<b>Holyoke</b> Joanne Lacour
<b>Southbridge</b> Joyce Clemence	<b>Newmarket Square</b> Diane Deban	<b>Lowell</b> Adrienne Anderson-Floyd	<b>New Bedford</b> Nelson Abreu	<b>Pittsfield</b> Deni Evans
<b>Worcester</b> Lori Jacques-Basiner	<b>Quincy</b> Erin Donnelly	<b>Malden</b> Martine Cesar	<b>Plymouth</b> Sabre Ibrahim	<b>Springfield Center</b> Melissa Pietraszkiewicz
		<b>North Shore</b> Sylvia Hosman	<b>Taunton</b> Karyn Gonzalez	