

Transitions

February 2004
Vol. XIX No. 2



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

From the Hotline	2
TAFDC Transportation and Food Stamp Benefit Amount	2
FYI - BEACON Help Revisions	3
FYI - Changes to the Department's Website Home Page	4
From the Forms File	4
Miscellaneous Food Stamp Program Changes	4
2004 Social Security/SSI COLA Update for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program	5
FYI - Signature Page Updates	5
FYI - Changes to Policy Online	5

Dear Fellow Employees,

In writing this column, my attention is focused on the new year and all of the opportunities 2004 will present. As we look ahead, we have a duty to continue providing help to those in need and, of course, we are also always looking for ways to do our work more efficiently. With these responsibilities in mind, I would like to take a closer look at a few of the initiatives we can expect to work on together in 2004.

At the top of the list is our continued commitment to working with homeless families. The close of 2003 saw the completion of the first step in the Governor's Executive Commission for Homeless Services Coordination. The Executive Commission is seeking ways to harness resources in the public and private sectors to manage and decrease homelessness in our state. Just 90 days after it began, the Commission released a report calling for the establishment of the Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing. I am pleased to report that the members of the Interagency Council have already been named and that the Council is chaired by Lieutenant Governor Healey. I expect that our agency will continue to play an active role as a member of the Council.

While much of the Commission's work will involve the longer-term task of creating permanent housing, our task at the Department is oriented more towards the front end of this process. Here's how we can help. We can facilitate shorter shelter stays by partnering with other resources in our communities and working closely with our homeless families so that potential housing opportunities are recognized as soon as possible and wherever possible. Now that I've had the opportunity to hear many of your experiences with this challenging population, we are in the process of selecting and training 14 Intensive Case Managers (ICMs) to

From the Hotline

- Q.** A TAFDC recipient began participating in community service at our local elementary school. Since her only child is three years old, she is work program required. She requested child care for her son. Can we authorize child care services for this community service activity?
- A.** Yes, in this situation child care services may be authorized for community service participation. As a work program required grantee, this parent must be employed or engaged in another approved activity at least 20 hours each week. (Refer to 106 CMR 203.400 for more details on the work program requirement.) Since her child is only three years old, she can not confine her community service participation to school hours and therefore a child care authorization would be appropriate for this AU.
- Q.** A TAFDC work program required recipient just completed his 60-day job search period and has been unable to find work. He is a single parent with three school-aged children. Today he mentioned that he would perform community service work at a nonprofit in the neighborhood. While in the process of completing an EDP, he asked me if he would be eligible for child care services as a result of his community service participation. Can I authorize child care services for this activity?
- A.** Yes. However, in this case first determine whether the community service may be performed during normal school hours. As much as possible, if parents have school-aged children, any community service work should be performed during a child's regular school hours. If these hours are not possible at the site he selected, the parent should try to find a different community service site where he *can* participate during normal school hours. If a different community service referral is not possible for this AU, then it would be appropriate for the father to fulfill his work program requirement at this site; and it would be appropriate for the worker to authorize child care services for this activity.
- Q.** What if I determine there are no other possible community service activities available for the father described above, and I approve the activity but then find out that there is no child care available for the father?

- A.** If the community service referral is approved but child care is unavailable, then the father may claim good cause for not participating in the community service activity. Refer to 106 CMR 701.380 for more information on acceptable good cause reasons.

TAFDC Transportation and Food Stamp Benefit Amount

TAFDC, FS

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 049

This update transmits the following changes:

- Chapter XII, Section C and Chapter XVI, Section H: Changes the maximum amount of transportation payments from \$60 to \$71.
- Chapter XVI, Section H: Removes the language that a food stamp benefit amount cannot equal \$1, \$3 or \$5.

"In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in things essential to mutual progress."

Booker T. Washington (U.S. educator and writer, 1856-1915)

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised.

Added:

Add an Absent Parent Record

Add or Edit Lawsuit/Claim
Information

Create a Sanction for an
Assessed Person

Delete an Alternate Name

Enter a New Alternate Name
Process Verification

Remove a Sanction for a Good
Cause Reason

Select a New Activity

Update an Alternate Name

Revised:

Absence Tab

Accessing a Colleague's Views

Accident and Incident

Activity Search List

Alternate Name

AU Composition Good Cause
Tab

AU Composition Results

AU Composition Sanctions Tab

Lawsuit/Claim Tab

Transportation Plan

Transportation Request

Verification Tab



Continued from Page 1

handle some of these cases and further our objectives in working with people who have become homeless.

In the area of food stamp access, we will continue building on our successes. Last year, we were able to provide access to the food stamp application on line through our Department's home page.

Also, as you know, Massachusetts residents may now obtain food stamp applications from a variety of other sources. The paper application has been distributed to different local food banks and pantries as well as local offices of the Department of Employment and Training and the Office of Child Care Services.

There are also a number of initiatives planned for the Food Stamp Program this year. For example, we are piloting a new Web-based food stamp application. The application design was created through a coordinated effort between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), our Department and Project Bread, a non-profit organization in Massachusetts. Food stamp applicants will be able to apply for benefits through the personal computer, without having to print out a paper application. This initiative is being phased in gradually. Hyannis DTA staff will be the first to pilot the Web-based application. In the coming months, the staff at other Transitional Assistance offices will follow their lead.

In addition, over the past year our agency has expanded the work requirement to families with children between age two and school age. Efforts to broaden the TAFDC work requirement will continue into 2004, as we begin preparing our recipients for the more rigorous federal work requirement that will be mandated in Massachusetts once our welfare reform waiver expires in 2005. By engaging our clients in work and work-related activities, we are helping them lay the cornerstone for future financial independence.

As always, I encourage you to share your ideas on how you believe we can best ensure the smooth implementation of these initiatives, and I want to thank you all for your continued hard work and commitment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Wagner". The signature is stylized and cursive.

John Wagner, Commissioner

FYI

Changes to the Department's Website Home Page

This month you will see the following changes to the Department's Internet Website Home Page.

Employment Services Program (ESP)

Transportation: The amount of money that a TAFDC recipient can be reimbursed for transportation costs while participating in ESP has been changed from \$60 to \$71.

DTA Office Locations

Locations of DTA Offices: The DTA Office Location page has been revised and includes the following changes:

- a brief summary precedes the DTA Office Location option;
- a new option entitled *SSI Office Location* now appears on the page and a brief summary precedes the option; and
- the SSI offices appear after the SSI Office Location option, and when an office name is selected the office address and telephone number are displayed.

From the Forms File

Obsolete Form/Poster

The following form and poster are now obsolete.

09-174-1296-05

09-175-1296-05 (S)

FS/WR

Food Stamp Work Requirement Registration

This form is obsolete because by signing the application, AU members between ages of 16 and 60 are now automatically enrolled in FS/E&T by signing the application.

18-860-0399-05

18-861-0399-05 (S)

Access to Jobs Poster

This poster is obsolete due to a program change. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2003-32B.

Miscellaneous Food Stamp Program Changes

FS

State Letter 1270

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 049

This State Letter transmits the following changes:

- **Rounding:** To determine the net income of an assistance unit, all expenses and deductions that end in 1 through 49 cents will be rounded down to the next whole dollar, and expenses and deductions that end in 50 through 99 will be rounded up to the next whole dollar.
- **\$1, \$3, \$5 Rule:** Calculated food stamp amounts of \$1, \$3, and \$5 were increased to \$2, \$4, and \$6 respectively to accommodate the food stamp coupon book amounts. The EBT payment system negates this practice, and the Department is now able to issue the actual calculated food stamp benefit amount.
- **Categorical Eligibility Rules:** A technical correction restricts the Residency deemed eligibility factor to TAFDC, SSI and EAEDC AUs only and the Sponsored Noncitizen Deemed eligibility factor to TAFDC and SSI AUs only.

2004 Social Security/SSI COLA Update for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program

All

Field Operations Memo
2004-3

This Field Operations memo:

- informs TAO staff that, effective January 2004, Social Security benefits and SSI payments increased by 2.1 percent. The base level Medicare Part B premium increased from \$58.70 to \$66.60. The Medicare Part B penalty premium also increased;
- explains how BEACON updated Assessed Persons (APs) with the 2004 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts and recalculated eligibility for the active AUs containing the updated APs;
- explains which AUs listed on the “Clients With RSDI and/or SSI” View require AU Manager action; and
- gives procedures for AU Managers to update AUs with discrepant 2004 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts.

FYI

Signature Page Updates

The Department recently updated the language on the signature page of all paper applications and BEACON-generated applications.

Food Stamp Rights and Responsibilities: Applicants and recipients are now informed of their responsibility to report and verify expenses to receive the related deduction in their food stamp calculation. This is a Department initiative to decrease recipient-caused QC errors. The recipient will not be allowed the deduction unless the expense is verified.

Food Stamp Employment and Training: By signing the application, AU members between the ages of 16 and 60 are now automatically enrolled in FS/E&T. This simplified registration is part of the Department’s overall outreach effort. A simplified FS/E&T enrollment process is convenient for recipients, AU Managers and our collaborating agencies.

Local Housing Authorities: By signing the application, the applicant gives the Department permission to contact local housing authorities to verify or corroborate information relating to eligibility for assistance and services.

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

Related Systems Information Window

The AU Processing option has been deleted from the list of available options and a new option *Food Stamp AU Processing* has been added to the list.

Food Stamp AU Processing Window

The AU Processing window displays the following options:

- NPA Food Stamp Benefits and Pure SSI Food Stamp Benefits Processing Chart; and
- Expedited Food Stamp Benefits Issuance Chart.

The First, Second and Third Quarter AU Processing Schedules previously accessed from the AU Processing window are available as Actuate Reports.