

Transitions

February 2006
Vol. XXI No. 2



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

From the Hotline	2
From the Forms File	3
TAFDC: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services- New ESP Component	4
2006 Social Security/SSI COLA Update for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program	4
Verification of Homelessness	4
Presumptive Eligibility Data	5
Medicare Part D Program	5
No Increase in Food Stamps as a Result of a Cash Program Sanction - BEACON Automation of Riverside Rule	6
RSDI Claim Number Edits in BEACON and BEACON- Generated Cleanup	6
Bay State CAP Recertification	7
Functionality Change to Absence Window on BEACON	7
Learning Disabilities Screening and Assessment	7
Food Stamp Attributed Amount Related Benefit Notice	8
ESP Services-Transportation	8
FYI - BEACON Help Revisions	8

Continued on Page 3

From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

In December's *Commissioner's Corner*, I wrote to you about our Department's performance in the three Program areas: Cash Assistance and Full Engagement (CAFE), Food Stamps and Housing. We looked at the achievements we've made together and the awards we've received. To continue building on this success, I'd like to take a closer look at *how* we met our goals so that this year we can make even greater progress.

Over the past few years, I've noticed many of you using a variety of practices and techniques to achieve results, but a common ingredient present in each local office is quality customer service. As you know, customer service is a process we use to build trust and mutual respect. I realize that for many of you, the time you have to interact with each individual client is limited. In some cases, when you don't get the courtesy and respect you deserve, it may take even more effort to maintain excellence in this area.

But mutual courtesy and respect is the only way we'll be able to carry out the priorities we've established for 2006. In the CAFE program, these priorities include increased up-front screening and assessments for our clients as well as the smooth implementation of our new Vocational Rehabilitation Services component. By moving beyond the exempt/nonexempt labels, we can start focusing on what each of our individual clients need to reach financial stability and independence. In the Food Stamp Program, our priorities include increased access – ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are followed to increase our rate of successful applications – while at the same time maintaining our low error rate. In redefining homelessness, we plan to maintain our focus on “housing first”

Continued on Page 2

models. This includes implementing a Regional Collaborative for all homeless and at-risk families, a pilot program for those individuals facing chronic homelessness and extending HMIS training and implementation.

Although I began this letter describing the professional practices that I've observed in local offices, I realize that delivering lasting results and self-sufficiency for our clients requires a commitment at every level within our Department, including Executive staff at Central Office. For this reason, we've also built the ongoing implementation of our Central Office reorganization, internal controls and BEACON "replatforming" into our Agency priorities for 2006. The plans for a BEACON "replatforming" are beginning in 2006, but implementation will actually extend over the next few years. The new application will be called BEACON 3.0. All the functionality of BEACON 2.0 will be included in this new application as well as additional enhancements.

It will be another busy year, but I'm looking forward to it. Your help in implementing these priorities is essential. I'll continue to keep you up-to-date on the progress we're making in these areas.

As I am writing this, I have just heard the news of Coretta Scott King's passing. February is Black History Month and her passing calls to mind all that she and her husband have helped to accomplish in the struggle for Civil Rights over the past few decades. Their efforts have brought us all to a better place. Maintaining quality customer service is in many ways connected to the ideals that these great leaders inspired.

In working to eliminate poverty, hunger and homelessness, it is now our challenge to help realize their aspirations.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

From the Hotline

The questions below pertain to flexible credits and how they are treated in the Food Stamp Program. Refer to *Transitions*, January 2006, FYI "**Pay Stubs with Flexible Credits**" for more details on this topic.

- Q.** An applicant came into our office today and applied for food stamp benefits. She is employed at a company that offers health insurance through an "employee medical credit" of \$400 each month. My applicant has chosen to enroll in this medical insurance option. Therefore, her gross monthly income amount includes an additional \$400. If she had chosen to forgo the health insurance coverage, the \$400 would not be added to her gross monthly income. Is this flexible credit countable as earned income?
- A.** No. Flexible credits provided by employers that are used for benefits such as health insurance or life insurance but cannot be taken as cash by the employee, are not countable as income.

Unless you are familiar with the terms of your

FYI - Changes to DTA Online	9
FYI - Changes to Policy Online	10
FYI - Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Care Mailing	11
FYI - Updates to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage	11

applicant's flexible credit program, follow-up is required. Remember to make note of the terms of the flexible credit on the Narratives Tab. Written documentation from the employer or a collateral contact should be indicated in the narrative as well.

- Q.** A food stamp recipient receives an additional \$35 flexible credit each month that she can use to pay for benefits such as child care or medical insurance costs. She has chosen not to take advantage of these benefits and therefore receives an additional \$35 each month in her gross pay amount. Is this flexible credit countable as earned income in the Food Stamp Program?
- A.** Yes. The Food Stamp Program treats this flexible credit as countable earned income. Again, it is important to remember to

make note of the terms of the flexible credit on the Narratives Tab. Written documentation from the employer or a collateral contact should be indicated in the narrative as well.

From the Forms File

New Form

15-205-0106-05
LDSC (1/2006)
Learning Disability Screening/Assessment Consent/Declination Form

This form is completed when a learning disability screening and assessment request is made. The Spanish version is on the reverse side.

Revised Form/Revised Brochure

18-021-0106-05
TPLI (Rev. 1/2006)
Third Party Liability Indicator

The Third Party Liability Unit address and fax number have been revised on the form.

02-820-0106-05
02-822-0106-05 (S)
CC-1 Mail (Rev.1/2006)
Child Care - Getting and Keeping Child Care

References to the Office for Child Care Services (OCCS) have been changed to the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). The Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R) contact information has been updated.

The following forms listed below are now available in Spanish.

13-271-0206-05
4Family Release (S)
4Family Release of Information Between DTA and DPH F.O.R. Families

13-076-0206-05
TES-WN-13 (S)
Warning Notice of Noncompliance

TAFDC: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services – New ESP Component

TAFDC

State Letter 1310

Field Operations Memo 2006-1

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is offering Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) as a new Employment Services Program (ESP) component statewide to TAFDC recipients.

This activity will give recipients the opportunity to meet with a qualified vocational rehabilitation provider who offers a program of employment services, which will enhance recipients' self-sufficiency by identifying significant barriers to employment and planning and offering appropriate solutions to those barriers.

The purpose of the Field Operations Memo is to:

- inform TAO staff of the VR component;
- provide procedures for referring recipients to qualified providers; and
- inform AU Managers about their responsibilities and recipients' responsibilities during and after the VR participation period.

The State Letter establishes policy for creating the Vocational Rehabilitation Services ESP Component.

2006 Social Security/SSI COLA Update for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program

All

Field Operations Memo 2006-2

Effective January 2006, Social Security benefits and SSI payments increased by 4.1 percent. The base level Medicare Part B premium increased from \$78.20 to \$88.50. The Medicare Part B penalty premium also increased, as identified in the 2006 Medicare Part B Surcharge Premiums chart.

This Field Operations Memo:

- explains how BEACON updated APs with the 2006 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 2006 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts.

Verification of Homelessness

EA

State Letter 1308

Field Operations Memo 2006-4

This State Letter transmits a clarification of the acceptable types of verification of homelessness for EA shelter benefits. When the reason for homelessness does not meet the criterion of being a fire, eviction, threat to health and/or safety, mistreatment, or severe medical condition, the applicant must verify that the current and, if applicable, the prior living situation are no longer available. The applicant must provide verification by means of collateral contacts.

This Field Operations Memo, in a Q & A format, addresses some of the more difficult EA regulations that may cause confusion.

Presumptive Eligibility Data

EA
Field Operations Memo
2006-5

This Field Operations Memo includes instructions on recording the actual date the last verification is received. This date must be entered in the *Benefit Effective Date* field on the Interview Wrap-up EBC Results window. This is the date the EA AU's eligibility stops being presumptive.

Staff must monitor the Reevaluation Due View for EA AUs that are listed as EA-Presumptive AUs with an end date that is prior to the current date. These are EA AUs that have received benefits as presumptive for more than 30 days.

“No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to know.”

Alice Walker



Medicare Part D Program

FS
Field Operations Memo 2006- 3

In late 2004, many food stamp applicants/recipients who were Medicare recipients began participating in the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program (MPDDP).

As of January 2006, Medicare Part D will replace the MPDDP, which is being phased out. Medicare Part D will be available to all persons who receive RSDI and SSI benefits (*the dual eligibles*), and persons who receive RSDI only, if otherwise income and asset eligible.

This Field Operations Memo transmits procedures for processing applicants/recipients who are MPDDP and/or Medicare Part D participants. DTA will be working with FS applicants /recipients who fall into one of the following categories:

Applicant/Recipient Group 1	MPDDP Participant Now Enrolled in Medicare Part D
Applicant Group 2	MPDDP Participant Now Enrolled in Medicare Part D; did not receive FS Benefits in 2005
Applicant/Recipient Group 3	Medicare Part D only, never enrolled in MPDDP
Applicant Group 4	MPDDP Participant not Enrolled in Medicare Part D

AU Managers must ask applicants/recipients who receive SSI and/or RSDI about Medicare Part D participation at (re)application and recertification.



No Increase in Food Stamps as a Result of a Cash Program Sanction – BEACON Automation of Riverside Rule

FS

State Letter 1307

Field Operations Memo 2006-6

State Letter 1307, effective January 16, 2006, issues policy revisions to the way the Riverside Rule is applied for the Food Stamp Program. The Riverside Rule is a policy requiring that the Department not increase FS benefits when an AU's cash benefits under another federal or state means-tested program have been decreased due to fraud or a failure to comply with a requirement of that program. The rule does not apply when the cash benefit is terminated.

To prevent food stamp benefits from increasing when a sanction is imposed, the Food Stamp Attributed Amount is entered into BEACON. Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.18, this function is automated in BEACON. When an AU Manager imposes a sanction, BEACON will now enter the appropriate Food Stamp Attributed Amount and remove that amount when the sanction is cured or the cash program AU is closed.

This Field Operations Memo:

- defines the sanction reasons subject to the Riverside Rule;
- describes the automated process by which BEACON enters or removes the FS Attributed Amount;
- identifies two informational reports that will list FS AUs with FS Attributed Amounts updated or removed;
- includes cleanup reports requiring AU Manager follow-up to determine if benefits are owed; and
- provides instructions for calculating and issuing benefits owed.



RSDI Claim Number Edits in BEACON and BEACON-Generated Cleanup

TAFDC, EAEDC and FS
Field Operations Memo
2006-7

Modifications have been made to BEACON to reduce errors in processing Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI) income changes. This memo provides information about:

- a series of hard edits that will prevent AU Managers from entering the additional characters in claim numbers shown on SSA's documents and reduce the instances of doubled RSDI income amounts;
- a soft edit that was made to the Other Income Status window for situations in which an RSDI income record is about to be deleted;
- a cleanup of claim numbers that was completed to eliminate system-generated duplicate records; and
- the AU Manager review and correction of discrepant RSDI/SSI amounts in BEACON.

Bay State CAP Recertification

FS
Field Operations Memo
2006-8

Recertification of Bay State CAP Assistance Units (AUs) will occur either when the Social Security Administration (SSA) redetermines eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or when the Department of Transitional Assistance recertifies the AUs. It is hoped that the majority of Bay State CAP AUs will be recertified for food assistance benefits as part of the SSI redetermination. However, some Bay State CAP AUs will not be redetermined for SSI within the three-year certification period for food assistance benefits.

This memo provides TAO staff information and instructions about Bay State CAP recertifications.

Functionality Change to Absence Window on BEACON

TAFDC
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 064

This update transmits instructions for a functionality change to the TAFDC Good Cause field of the (Child Support)

Cooperation Tab of the Absence window. Specifically, the Good Cause field of the Cooperation Tab of the Absence window will be enabled for every TAFDC applicant and recipient. AU Managers must ask each applicant and recipient the question: "Are you claiming Good Cause?" The exception is that this field is not a mandatory fill when the Reason for Absence is death.

AU Managers must ask the applicant or recipient if he or she needs help getting proof of good cause. If "Conception result: incest/rape" or "Physical/ Emotional or D.V. risk" is chosen as a Good Cause reason, a referral should be made to the Domestic Violence Specialist for follow-up services.

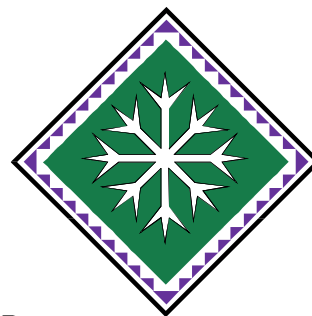
Learning Disabilities Screening and Assessment

TAFDC
State Letter 1309
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 065

The Department has agreed to provide TAFDC applicants and recipients with the opportunity for screenings and in-depth assessments for learning disabilities. This agreement will help TAFDC applicants and recipients with learning disabilities obtain equal access to participation in DTA's Employment Services Program (ESP). DTA's role is to ensure that TAFDC applicants and recipients with learning disabilities are helped in overcoming barriers to reaching self-sufficiency.

The State Letter establishes policy for DTA to conduct the Learning Disabilities Screenings and Assessments.

The User's Guide Update incorporates procedures from Field Operations Memo 2005-58 into the Guide.



Winter

Food Stamp Attributed Amount Related Benefit Notice

All

*A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and
BEACON – Update 066*

This update transmits the following changes:

- Chapter XIV, Section D: Other Income - This section has been revised to delete procedures for the manual process used to determine the Food Stamp Attributed Amount for individuals with a cash program sanction that is subject to the Riverside Rule. Information has been added to describe the automated process that calculates and enters the correct Food Stamp Attributed Amount.
- Chapter XVI, Section H: Related Benefits - This section now includes information about the Related Benefit Notice, which is used to notify recipients of additional benefits beyond the regular semimonthly cash or monthly FS benefit.

ESP Services – Transportation

TAFDC

*A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and
BEACON – Update 067*

This update transmits the following changes:

1. The maximum monthly amount of transportation payments to a TAFDC active or closed AP has increased from \$71 to \$80.
2. The length of time a closed TAFDC AP can receive transportation payments has increased from 60 days to six months.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been updated. The list reflects updates made to both the primary and secondary windows.

Application

- Fields & Buttons
- Application

- Warnings, Edits & Messages

AU Composition Results

- Fields & Buttons
- Active by Grantee Name (View)
- Active by Program (View)
- Appointments to Schedule\Reevaluation Due (View)
- AU Composition Results - AU Tab
- AU Composition Results
- AU Composition Results Inquiry Mode (Pop-up)
- AU Composition Results Update Mode (Pop-up)
- Change a Presumptive EA AU to an EA-Regular AU or EA-Six Months AU (“How To”)
- Change the Reevaluation End Date for an EA-Presumptive AU (“How To”)
- Complete Verifications for an EA-Presumptive AU (“How To”)
- Determine Financial Eligibility for Presumptive Eligibility (“How To”)
- Identify EA-Presumptive AUs (“How To”)
- Terminate an Ineligible Presumptive EA AU (“How To”)
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Citizenship

- Fields & Buttons

- Citizenship
- Collect Citizenship Information (“How To”)
- Noncitizen Online Guide (Pop-up)

Interview Wrap-up

- Fields & Buttons
- Aid Paid Pending (Pop-up)
- Benefit Authorization Levels
- FHOs Only (Button)
- Interview Wrap-up Appeals Section
- Interview Wrap-up AUM Activities
- Interview Wrap-up Pending Authorization (View)
- Interview Wrap-up Request Tab
- Interview Wrap-up Request Type Priority
- Interview Wrap-up

Interview Wrap-up

Authorization

- Interview Wrap-up Authorization
- Fields & Buttons

Interview Wrap-up EBC

Results

- Interview Wrap-up EBC Results Updates Tab
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Monitor Participation

- Fields & Buttons
- Monitor Participation
- Accrete the Education/ Training Counter Properly (“How To”)

User Entered Verification

- Fields & Buttons
- Add or Change User-Entered Verification (“How To”)
- User-Entered Verification
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Glossary Terms

- Bay State CAP
- Child Care/CC
- Database
- DTA
- EA-3
- Household Member
- NFL-9
- Presumptive Eligibility/EA-Presumptive
- Radio Button/Button
- RHAPS
- TBA
- VC-1
- Window

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month you will see the following changes to DTA Online:

- **Our Organization – DTA Organization**
The Field Operations and MIS organizational charts have been updated to include recent personnel changes.
- **Administration and Finance**
A new option entitled *Job Openings at DTA* has been added to the list of available topics. When selected, the current list of DTA job postings will be displayed.
- **Administrative Memos**
The *Diversity Plan* is no longer included in the list of available memos.

A new memo entitled *Drug Free Workplace Policy* has been added to the list of memos.

- **Affirmative Action**

The Affirmative Action option has been removed and the memo entitled *Department of Transitional Assistance Affirmative Action Plan* has been added to the list of memos accessed from the Administrative Memos option.

- **Diversity**

A link entitled *February, 2006 – Black History Month* has been added to the topics available from the Events option.

The *Diversity Plan* has been added to the list of options available from the Diversity option.

- **Latest News/Photo Gallery**

The memo entitled: *Governor Romney's Budget Proposal* has been added to the list of available memos.

- **Resource Inventories**

A link to the *DTA Employment Resources Deskguide* appears as part of the Resource Inventories listing.

A new option entitled *ESP- Vocational Rehabilitation Providers* has been added to the Employment option. When selected, a table with the list of Vocational Rehabilitation providers will be displayed.

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

- **Online Forms**

The English and Spanish versions of the following forms have been added to the Online Forms option:

Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination of EA Benefits (NFL-9)

Emergency Replacement Request (TES-EPR-1)

Recipient Responsibilities While in a Temporary Shelter (TESR-1)

Acknowledgement of Recipient Responsibilities While in a Temporary Emergency Shelter (TESR-3)

- **Online Guides**

The *DTA Online Navigation Guide* has been updated to include this month's revisions to DTA Online.

- **Related Systems Information – BA Options – BENDEX – SSA Claim Number**

A new option entitled: *BEACON Claim Number Code Hard Edits* has been added as a separate option and is displayed under SSA Claim Number. When selected, the BEACON Claim Number Code Hard Edits table will be displayed. This table was issued with Field Operations Memo 2006-7: *TAFDC, EAEDC, EA and Food Stamp Program RSDI Claim Number Edits in BEACON and BEACON-Generated Cleanup.*



February

FYI

Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Care Mailing

During the second and third weeks in January 2006, an informational mailing was sent to all active TAFDC AUs, all TAFDC AUs closed since January 2005, and all active FS AUs, excluding FS AUs in the Malden Centralized SSI Office and FS AUs receiving TAFDC. The mailing included information about:

- the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is available to a person who worked in 2005 and whose income was below certain limits, even if income tax is not owed;
- the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (MEIC), which is available to a person who has earned income for 2005 and met the requirements of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit; and
- the Child Care brochure, which explained how to get and keep child care, provided information for review with the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency, including how the child care fee is determined, and provides a listing of the names and addresses of CCR&R agencies.

A multilingual card was also enclosed in the mailing.

FYI

Updates to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

This month you will see the following changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage.

- Researcher Tab – Basic Needs

The TAFDC, EAEDC, and SSI caseload reports have been updated and can be viewed by selecting the Financial Assistance option.

The Food Stamps caseload report has been updated and can be viewed by selecting the Food and Nutrition option.

The Homeless Individual and Family report has been updated and can be viewed by selecting the Housing and Shelter option.