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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, national and global recession and financial uncertainty are affecting our Commonwealth. Some of our neighbors are losing their jobs, their homes, and their health insurance. There is unprecedented demand for the services we offer: food assistance, cash assistance, employment supports, and emergency shelter.

Governor Patrick recognizes the importance of providing low-income individuals and families with the support they need during these difficult times. While the October 2008 budget reductions were painful, and caseloads are on the rise, the Department has been able to preserve core services. Unfortunately, the economy has worsened and Massachusetts faces an additional \$1.1 billion budget gap.

Today, Governor Patrick announced his Emergency Recovery Plan, which includes a recalibrated budget for the remainder of FY09 and his FY10 House 1 budget proposal. This is a balanced, responsible plan which preserves many key functions of government and provides support for safety-net services like ours. This memorandum will provide some of the details concerning the proposal and its potential impact on our department, our programs, and the recipients we serve.

FY09

Closing the FY09 budget gap will require \$191 million in additional budget cuts, \$68 million in additional revenues, \$327 million in rainy day funds, and \$533 million in anticipated enhanced federal Medicaid matching funds. Behind each reduction is a difficult decision which was carefully considered by the Governor, his cabinet, and all agencies.

A total of \$63 million in cuts are spread across the Executive Branch. Our Department can expect a \$1.9 million decrease in information technology funding in our Administrative account. We are working diligently to secure bond funding to cover this reduction. Fortunately, no additional mid-year programmatic changes are being made at DTA.

(Continued on page 2)

From the Commissioner (Continued from page 1)

FY10

The House I Budget includes total spending of \$27.97 billion across the Commonwealth, including \$13.9 billion within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. This is approximately \$200 million less than the final FY09 budget.

It is notable that within the context of a shrinking budget, the total funding for DTA programs is increased by \$9 million, or 1% (adjusted for the value of the homeless transfer discussed below) over FY09 spending levels. This increase reflects the Administration's commitment to preserving the safety net for low-income individuals and families. The total state funding for DTA is \$773.6 million. Another, \$145.5 million in state funding is being transferred through the consolidations proposed by the Governor to encourage cost-effectiveness and responsiveness to the needs of Massachusetts residents. In addition, the Department will issue nearly \$1 billion in federal Food Stamp SNAP benefits in FY10.

Housing and Homeless Services

As we have previously discussed, today the Administration filed legislation to transfer the Emergency Assistance Program (EA), individual shelters, and the Home and Healthy for Good program to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The funding for these programs is included within DHCD's budget. There were some reductions in funding to the EA program, stemming from the October budget reduction process and anticipated savings from proposed regulation changes.

In developing these proposed regulatory changes, filed with the Legislature today, we considered feedback from a variety of stakeholders including DTA staff, shelter and housing assistance providers, local housing authorities, advocacy groups and legal services. As a result, we focused on maintaining benefits for families having the greatest difficulty meeting their basic needs while encouraging self-sufficiency through motivation and incentives. The proposed changes include:

- Ending eligibility if the client refuses the first offer of safe and reasonable housing;
- Requiring all families to participate in a self-sufficiency plan (in which each adult would be required to work 30 hours per week unless there is a good cause reason for not doing so) and save 30% of their total income;
- Denying shelter for anyone who has an outstanding arrest or default warrant and does not resolve it within 30 days of entering shelter;
- Reducing the period for extended eligibility upon receipt of income from six months to three months;
- Defining the "abandonment" of emergency shelter as any failure to stay at the placement for two consecutive nights without prior notification or good cause (e.g., emergency hospitalization);
- Changing the maximum age of an eligible "child" to 18, with an exemption for those 19 or younger and attending school and those who are 20 or younger and disabled; and
- Denying households that are evicted or leave public or subsidized housing without good cause.

(Continued on page 3)

From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 2)*

These changes are part of a comprehensive response to provide housing and stabilization services to homeless families. The transfer of the homeless programs, along with the recently completed reprocurement of the family shelter system, will provide a framework to more effectively rapidly re-house families. These three initiatives will ensure that the Administration, providers and clients have a shared responsibility in reducing homelessness in the Commonwealth.

Cash Assistance and Full Engagement

The House I budget maintains eligibility and benefits for cash assistance programs at current levels, and increases funding to allow for rising caseloads. The Governor proposes to combine TAFDC, EAEDC, SSI, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNA) program into a single account called “Transitional Assistance Payments.” Funding for Employment Services and Teen Living Programs will also be consolidated under a separate line-item called “Employment and Supportive Services for TAFDC families.”

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps

The Governor’s budget continues to include funding for SNAP outreach efforts. Also incorporated is funding to maintain the SNAP call center in Brockton.

Administrative Funding

The administrative budget funding for DTA is \$114.6 million for FY10. The Governor proposes to consolidate our Administrative, SNAP Administration, Domestic Violence Specialists, and Caseworkers accounts into one Administration Account. This funding level will require us to manage our administrative resources closely in the coming year, and may require us to make difficult decisions about the way that we can provide services.

Information Technology (IT) Consolidation

The Governor will be releasing an Executive Order today, and including provisions in the FY 10 budget to consolidate IT services at the Secretariat level. In addition, planning will begin to consolidate IT infrastructure, data centers and Commonwealth wide applications at the Information Technology Division (ITD). The goals of the IT consolidation are to better align Secretaries’ IT resources with their business strategies and priorities, standardize IT resources and create efficiencies.

DTA benefit levels and services remain intact for the coming Fiscal Year; however, due to our fiscal climate, new funding is simply not available. As we move forward during this challenging economic time, it is more important than ever to implement creative ways to do business differently, maximizing our existing resources and increasing our efficiency.

We look forward to the possibility of Federal Economic Stimulus assistance, and will monitor what is happening regarding funding for TANF, SNAP, and other support services.

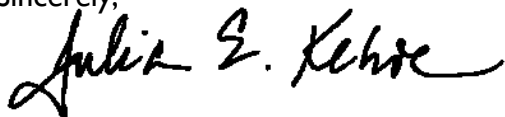
(Continued on page 4)

From the Commissioner (Continued from page 3)

The Governor's budget is the first step in a process that will unfold over the next five months. I will keep you informed as each branch of the Legislature debates the Governor's budget, and releases its own proposal.

Thank you, as always, for your dedication to assisting low-income families and individuals to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors. The first error was caused by failure to remove a Work Program sanction in a TAFDC case while the second error was caused by countable income that was excluded from a case.

Sanction Removal in TAFDC Case

The case consisted of a mother and her thirteen-year-old son who were both receiving TAFDC benefits. The SNAP portion of the case was certified for one year from May 8, 2008 through May 7, 2009. The mother was sanctioned for not meeting her TAFDC Work Program requirements. During the QC review (September 2008), documentation from the University of Massachusetts Disability Evaluation Services (DES) that was found in the case record indicated that the client was disabled until January 09, 2009. Since the documentation affirming the client's disability had been previously overlooked by the case manager, the client had not been reinstated as a TAFDC client and consequently the SNAP attributed amount of \$103 had not been removed from the SNAP portion of the case. This caused an underissuance error.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

When DES determines that a client is disabled, both the client and the case manager are notified in writing. In addition, since the client was coded as nonexempt during the review period, BEACON automatically updated the Disability window with the approval information from DES and automatically populated the Narratives tab with the batch job entry that identifies the outcome of the disability claim.

Since this client had a Work Program sanction, the case manager should have reopened the client in the TAFDC case in the AU Mandatory Responsible window, removed the sanction and the associated sanction reason on the AU Composition Results window, changed the case exemption status from nonexempt to exempt on the TAFDC tab of the Work Requirements window and changed the Work Program Required radio button to No. BEACON would have automatically removed the SNAP attributed amount at the time the sanction was removed.

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Quality Corner (Continued from page 4)

If additional TAFDC benefits were owed to the client based on an increased payment standard due to disability status, the case manager should have calculated and issued retroactive TAFDC and SNAP payments in the Related Benefits window. For more information on claiming a TAFDC disability, see a *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIII-H, and for more information on reopening a previously sanctioned individual, see a *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter IX.

Note: If the disability claim had been denied by DES, the narrative entry that automatically populates the Narratives tab would have alerted the case manager to review the client's work requirements.

Interest Income from a Bank Account

This NPA household consisted of a husband, a wife and a five-year-old child. The case was last recertified as a Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) case from August 10, 2008 through February 9, 2009. Based on household composition, this case was categorically eligible.

QC determined that the client had \$38,429.49 in a bank account prior to the time of the last recertification. This bank account balance generated interest income of \$70.02 monthly.

The interest should have been counted as unearned income in the USR case that was established at recertification. Although this was a categorically eligible case for which assets are noncountable, case managers must remember that interest income generated by noncountable assets are countable and in this case caused an underpayment error of \$32.00. This was a client error because the bank account was not reported and the case manager never received a bank match.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

With the expansion of categorical eligibility, the possibility of income received in the form of interest, dividends, etc. must be explored for all SNAP households. Today, there are many SNAP clients with substantial assets because this factor no longer precludes eligibility for SNAP benefits. Case managers must remember to ask clients about interest income because it is countable for SNAP purposes. For more information on countable income, see 106 CMR 363.220(A).

Do you know...?

In addition to finding resources and services through our Commonwealth's website www.mass.gov, DTA staff and clients can go to www.MassResources.org for comprehensive information on state and local resources relevant to the needs of low-and moderate-income families and individuals of all ages. The website provides useful information about a broad range of assistance programs, both public and private, for people in need living in Massachusetts.

Note: The www.MassResources.org website is run by a not-for-profit organization called Community Resources Information, Inc. This organization is not affiliated with federal, state or local governments.

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

Request for Sex Offender Registry Information

13-300-0209-05

DTA-SORB (Rev. 2/2009)

The *Request for Sex Offender Registry Information* form has been revised. The revision increased the size of the “SORB Use Only” box. Please discard old versions of this form and use the revised version.

Good Cause Medical Statement

02-720-0209-05

TAFDC-GCMS (Rev. 2/2009)

The *Good Cause Medical Statement* has been revised to coincide with a regulatory change that now includes nurse practitioner as a competent medical authority.

SNAP Change Report Form

09-005-0209-05

09-006-0209-05(S)

SNAP-5 (Rev. 2/2009)

The *SNAP Change Report* form has been revised to reflect the Food Stamp Program name change to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

09-375-0209-05

09-376-0209-05(S)

SNAP-USR-2 (Rev. 2/2009)

The Categorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Standards have been updated on this form.

In addition, references to the Food Stamp Program name have been changed to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Please discard old versions and use the revised version of this form.

Revised Brochures

What Noncitizens Need to Know

25-404-0209-05

25-402-0209-05 (HC)

25-403-0209-05 (POR)

25-405-0209-05 (S)

NCIB (Rev. 2/2009)

This brochure has been revised due to changes in the noncitizen sponsor deeming regulations for TAFDC and SNAP. Refer to State Letter 1344 for more information.

How to Get Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits (formerly the food stamp program)

09-070-0209-05

09-079-0209-05(S)

SNAP-INFO (Rev. 2/2009)

The Income Standard for Households with Children Under 19 or a Pregnant Woman Living Alone has been changed. Please use this revised version and discard any old versions of this brochure.

From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

- Q.** My TAFDC client is scheduled to start a training program in two weeks. Although she is not currently participating in the program, she wants to arrange for child care services today so that she is ready to begin training on her program's start date. Can I make a child care referral today based on her expected start date?
- A.** Yes. The child care referral can be issued up to two weeks prior to the start of her training course. Once you have determined your client's anticipated date of enrollment and her scheduled participation hours, you can make the child care referral to the Child Care Resource and Referral agency (CCR&R). The CCR&R will then determine when it is appropriate to authorize the service. Their authorization may include the two-week period before the activity is scheduled to begin. This allows your client time to make any necessary arrangements and get her child settled in before the training program starts. Refer to 106 CMR 207.210 for more information on ESP support services.
- Q.** I have a TAFDC client with verification that she is scheduled to enroll in a GED program, but this verification does not include the program's end date. Can I make a child care referral without this information?
- A.** Yes. To make the child care referral, you do not need an end date for the program. Some education programs, particularly GED programs, are open-ended. When this is the case, the Child Care Referral Notice - BEA/CCA (Rev. 3/2007) - should list the component activity, the start date, and the hours each day for each activity. In the box with the heading "End Date," you may write a date that is six months from the enrollment date.
- Q.** An ESP participant in our TAO has completed one training/education course and has a four-week break before her next course begins. In the meantime, she's afraid of losing the child care arrangement she currently has. Can she continue receiving these child care services and keep her current arrangement?
- A.** Yes. Any TAFDC client eligible for child care services, including eligible teen parents, may continue to receive child care for a period of up to one month if the child care arrangements would otherwise be lost and a subsequent activity or the resumption of the current activity is scheduled to begin within the month.
- Q.** An ESP participant in our TAO is a work program required ineligible noncitizen, in accordance with 106 CMR 203.400. Before the end of his 60-day work search period, he found a job and is now requesting a referral for child care services. Is he eligible for a child care referral?

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From the Hotline *(Continued from page 7)*

A. Yes. This ineligible noncitizen can be referred for child care services.

Q. A TAFDC ineligible noncitizen has a one-month-old child and is exempt from the work program requirement. Can she be referred for child care services as an ESP volunteer?

A. Yes. This ineligible noncitizen can be referred for child care services.

NOTE: SNAP clients who pay for child care expenses are eligible for an expense deduction. Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(D) for more information.

Field Operations Memos**2009 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and SNAP**

All

Field Operations Memo 2009-1

The Social Security and SSI Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) have been scheduled. Effective January 2009, Social Security benefits and SSI payments increased by 5.8 percent. The base level Medicare Part B Premium remained at \$96.40. The Medicare Part B Penalty Premium also remained unchanged, as identified in the 2009 Medicaid Part B Surcharge Premiums Chart on page 5 of the memo.

This memo:

- explains how BEACON updated clients with the 2009 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts and recalculated eligibility for the active cases containing the updated clients;
- explains which cases listed on the “Clients With RSDI and/or SSI” view require case manager action; and

- transmits procedures for case managers to use to update cases with discrepant 2009 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts.

2009 MEDEX Premium Rate Changes

All

Field Operations Memo 2009-2

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts has announced Medex premium rate changes for the following non-group plans: Bronze, Core, Core Plus, Gold, Silver, and Standard. These changes were effective on January 1, 2009.

This memo:

- identifies the non-group plans that have changed and the corresponding rate changes;
- provides information on updates to SNAP benefits and the Medex premium amounts; and
- gives information about the 2009 Medex Premium Rate Change Report.

Field Operations Memos

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) Vocational Education Programs Update

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-3

This memo informs TAO staff that they may continue to refer clients to the Customer Service, Culinary Arts and Careers in Medical Office training programs offered by JVS.

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) “Independence through Employment” Project

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-4

This memo informs TAO staff that Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) has received a Project with Industry (PWI) grant to implement the “Independence through Employment” project.

The project will address the need for applicants and clients with significant disabilities, some of whom have been unemployed for over six months, to:

- identify viable career paths,
- receive training in job readiness/customer service skills and relevant job-specific training,
- enter competitive employment, and
- receive post-placement support and career advancement services.

TAFDC, EA and SNAP - 2009 HHS Poverty Guidelines

All

Field Operations Memo 2009-5

This memo notifies TAO staff that:

- as of 2/1/09, the eligibility standards used in BEACON calculations have been increased based on the 2009 federal poverty guidelines; and
- a report listing EA families who were changed to EA Six-Months cases between 1/23/2009 and 2/1/2009 but whose income is less than the increased EA Eligibility Standard will be issued to TAO staff for adjustment back to EA Regular cases based on the procedures in Field Operations Memo 2004-39A.

Nurse Practitioner Added to the Definition of Competent Medical Authorities

TAFDC and EAEDC

State Letter 1345

Field Operations Memo 2009-6

State Letter 1345 (effective February 6, 2009) adds nurse practitioner to the definition of a competent medical authority. Any form requiring the signature of a competent medical authority can be completed and signed by a nurse practitioner and will be an acceptable proof of a disability.

State Letter

TAFDC Eligibility Table for Income from the Parent(s) of a Teen Parent Under Age 18 and EA Eligibility Table

TAFDC and EA

State Letter 1346

The TAFDC and EA income eligibility tables are now found on the DTA website at www.mass.gov/dta by selecting the *Program Eligibility Charts and Tables* link under *Key Resources*.

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month, the following changes have been made to **DTA Online**:

- The DTA Online Navigation Guide accessible through “Online Guides” in the **Policy Online** side-bar option has been revised;
- A new “TAO E-Mail – Special Procedure” has been added and is accessible through the **Policy Online** side-bar option;
- YPP updates have been made to the High School and GED Programs within the “Employment Services Program” option which is accessible through the **Resource Inventories** side-bar;
- A new “Event” has been added and is accessible through the **Diversity** side-bar option; and
- A new Sick Leave Bank form has been added to the “Human Resource Management” listings which are accessible through the **Administration & Finance** tab.

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

This month, the following changes have been made to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage:

- The “Satellite Offices” and “Food Stamp Outreach Centers” options have been moved from the **Key Resources** side-bar to the **Initiatives** side-bar;
- The Food Stamp Eligibility Charts and Issuance Tables have been combined into a new link called “Program Eligibility Charts and Tables,” which is accessible through the **Key Resources** side-bar option;
- “DTA Facts and Figures” and DTA caseload information have been updated and can be accessed by selecting the appropriate Department program (EAEDC, FS, Homeless, SSI, TAFDC) beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar option; and
- The “Recipient Services Unit” description has been revised and is accessible through the **Contact Us** selection on the Homepage’s center column.

FYIs**Young Parent Program Provider Changes**

Effective immediately, the following providers will be offering Young Parent Program services to our clients in these new expanded areas:

| <u>Provider:</u> | <u>TAO Served:</u> |
|--|---|
| Community Care Services, Inc.* | Taunton |
| Corporation for Public Management | Greenfield Holyoke North Adams Pittsfield |
| Jobs for Youth Network (four slots only)** | Boston Family Housing Dudley Square Newmarket Square |
| Training Resources of America | Newmarket Square North Shore Revere Springfield Liberty Springfield State |

For a list of all YPP providers and the TAOs they serve, go to the *Resource Inventories* option of DTA Online, click on “Employment Services Programs,” click on “High School or GED Programs” and then click on “Young Parents Program.”

* New Provider

** Contract from February 1 – April 30, 2009.

Dates to Remember

February 16, 2009

Presidents’ Day

March 15, 2009

EOHHS Health Care Spending Account “grace period” deadline

After speaking with your manager about the details of this deadline, additional questions may be sent to: AskHR@ehs.state.ma.us.

Diversity Quote

“ America is not like a blanket - one piece of unbroken cloth. America is more like a quilt - many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven together by a common thread.”

Rev. Jesse Jackson

TAO Meeting Notes