

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you all experienced joyful holidays and a happy new year.

As we look ahead to the future, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on some recent projects, plans, and events.

First, I would like to congratulate Dennis Hohengasser, from our Central Office Training Unit, on receiving the EOHHS Center for Staff Development "Partner of the Year Award." This award is in recognition of Dennis' commitment to collaboration, support, and professional development for DTA staff. Great job Dennis!

I am also pleased to announce the passing of the supplemental budget, which was signed by the Governor on January 7, 2008. Our program and budget staff worked hard in collaborating with the Administration and Legislature to pass the budget which includes substantial funding for the Department of Transitional Assistance, including \$2.9 million in Emergency Assistance "Toolbox" funds and \$1.2 million for a supplemental nutrition program. As you know, these funds are crucial to achieve our goals, meet our mission, and assist people in need.

"Toolbox" offers flexible funds to help families quickly transition from shelter to permanent housing. A key component in a multi-pronged strategy, Toolbox also connects families to employment resources, increasing their self-sufficiency and quality of life.

The supplemental nutrition program, which was conceived and championed by Deputy Commissioner Todd Maio, provides a small subsidy to low-income working families who receive Food Stamp benefits but are not eligible for cash assistance. As we

improve our efforts to help families move from cash assistance to paid employment, this program will contribute to the Commonwealth's federal work participation requirements without the need for a separate eligibility determination.

As many of you are aware, December brought tragic fires to Everett, Gloucester, and Haverhill. I would like to thank our staff members in the Malden, Revere, North Shore, and Lawrence TAOs for their exemplary efforts in quickly responding to help displaced families secure necessary benefits and housing. I was moved and impressed by the way staff responded, especially considering one of the fires occurred during one of the weekends of the holiday season. Although the circumstances were incredibly difficult, our collaboration with dozens of state and local agencies achieved very positive results, which has been recognized by many of our external partners.

In Everett, we spoke with the temporarily evacuated elderly residents of a subsidized housing development. Even though virtually all of them were eligible, not one of these individuals was receiving Food Stamps. Some did not know they were qualified, some were overwhelmed by the application process, and others were afraid nutritional assistance would decrease the value of their housing vouchers. Staff members spoke with more than 50 elders about their concerns and signed them up for this critical benefit!

The Everett elders were a stark reminder that too many Massachusetts residents are simply unaware of our programs and services - and as a result, go they go hungry. In 2008, we will renew our commitment to expand outreach for nutritional assistance and the Food Stamp Program. Our efforts will include the opening, in late January, of satellite offices at five community-based organizations in communities not readily accessible to existing DTA offices: Northampton, Athol, Waltham, and Somerville. At the same time, Food Stamp staff will hold regular office hours in health and elder care centers in Boston, Lynn, Chelsea, and Fall River, focused on improving Food Stamp participation.

I am also thrilled to announce DTA's collaboration with other state agencies, community nonprofits and elected officials to convene an Anti-Hunger Summit in March. This groundbreaking event will focus on identifying best practices and recommendations on how to reduce hunger in the Commonwealth.

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors related to earned income. Both errors occurred in Non-Public Assistance (NPA) FS cases. One case was certified as a Recertification case (i.e. subject to the regular change reporting requirements) and the other was certified as a Universal Semiannual Reporting case.

Earnings of Group Home Residents

In the first case, the client was disabled and living in a group home. The recertification was filled out by the authorized representative at the group home. The client was working in a Sheltered Workshop. The authorized representative, however, did not report the client's wages on the recertification form. During the review, Q.C. determined that the client was working. This finding was based on a DOR match and also on the client's statement during the interview. The earnings were countable and caused the case to be ineligible.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

AU Managers must remember that some group home residents are employed and their earnings are countable. AU Managers must also remember to process outstanding match information

for each client, especially at the time of recertification or re-application. Some group home workers do not know or do not remember that the earnings of the residents are countable, so during the application or recertification interview, AU Managers must ask about earned income.

Note: The Central Office Food Stamp Unit plans to schedule training sessions for group home staff soon.

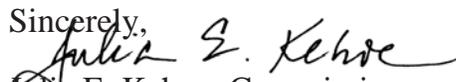
Incorrect Wages Counted at Recertification

The household consisted of an employed mother and her five minor children, one of whom received SSI. The client recertified at the end of her TBA period. At that time, she provided the AU Manager with three pay stubs. The AU Manager established the case as Universal Semiannual Reporting using the three stubs. QC reviewed the case and correctly used four pay stubs, which caused a significant overissuance error.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

Establishing a case on Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) helps to prevent errors only if the case is correctly processed at the time of certification or recertification. During

These are just a few of our plans to face the challenges of the New Year, and I am confident that we will enjoy a fulfilling and successful 2008. Thank you as always for your dedication and support.

Sincerely,

Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

Quality Corner (cont)

the USR period, households are required to report only a change in income that exceeds the maximum gross income limit for the household size (see 106 CMR 366.110 (C)). For USR cases, however, as well as for TBA cases, a case established incorrectly will remain incorrect for the remainder of the certification period.

If the client delayed supplying the fourth wage stub, the AU Manager should have waited until the client provided it, or should have obtained the client's permission to either contact the employer or use The Work Number. This could have resolved the situation quickly.

Note: If after receiving the fourth stub, for some reason the AU Manager thought it was correct to use only three stubs because one of them was not a good indication of the anticipated earnings for the certification period (for example, a one-time bonus was included in the pay), then the AU Manager should have documented this on the BEACON Narratives tab.

From the Forms File

New Form

13-273-1207-05

Ref-4F/PR (12/2007)

Project RISE/F.O.R Families Programs Referral Form

The *Project RISE/F.O.R Families Programs Referral Form* has been created for both the Project RISE and the F.O.R. Families programs. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2007-64 for more information about the use of this form.

Revised Forms

25-642-1207-05

25-643-1207-05 (S)

CCFS (Rev. 12/2007)

Child Care Fact Sheet

The *Child Care Fact Sheet* has been revised. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2007-66 for more information and use the revised version of this form.

Revised Brochure

25-650-1207-05

25-651-1207-05 (S)

EITC - B (Rev. 12/2007)

File Your Tax. Get Cash Back. It's That Easy

The EITC brochure has been revised. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2007-66 for more information and use the revised version of this brochure.

From the Hotline

An index to “From the Hotline” questions and answers published in *Transitions* during 2007 has been compiled below. The index is intended to provide quick access to policy information. Please remember that this index explains policy/procedure current as of the month/year in which the question and answer were issued.

Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children

Topic	Month	Related Policy, 106 CMR:
Asset - Tax Refund	March	321.120(I)
Competent Medical Authority	May	701.600(H)
Disabled - Medical Report	May	320.200
Income - Noncountable EIC	March	321.250(FF)
Income - Noncountable Reverse Mortgage	April	321.250(II)

EA: Clarification of the Noncompliance Process

Field Operations Memo 2007-64

This memo clarifies for staff the noncompliance process and discusses the referral staff must make to one of three support agencies before making a noncompliance referral to the Noncompliance Committee. The support agencies have staff trained in substance abuse, mental health and/or trauma-related services.

2008 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS

Field Operations Memo 2007-65

Effective January 2008, Social Security benefits and SSI benefits will increase by 2.3 percent. The basic Medicare Part B premium will increase from \$93.50 to \$96.40 per month.

This memo identifies:

- general BEACON activities for processing the 2008 Social Security/SSI COLA; and
- AU Manager and Supervisor activities required to prepare for the 2008 Social Security/SSI COLA.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC) and Child Care Assistance Mailing

TAFDC and FS
Field Operations Memo
2007-66

This memo informs TAO staff about the annual Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC) and Child Care Assistance campaign mailing beginning in January 2008.

The mailing will be sent to all active TAFDC clients, all former TAFDC clients whose case closed as of January 1, 2007 and all active food stamp cases, excluding FS cases in the Malden Centralized SSI Office and FS cases receiving TAFDC.



Continued from Page 4

Food Stamp Program

Topic	Month	Related/Procedure Policy, 106 CMR:
Assets - Tax Refund	March	363.130(E)
Categorical Eligibility	March	365.180
Deduction - Dependent Care	November	364.400(D)
Deduction - Shelter	April	364.400(G)
Deduction - Shelter Vacated Home	August	364.400(G)
Deduction - Shelter Shared Housing	July	364.400(G)
Deduction - SUA	April	364.400(G)
Deduction - SUA	August	364.400(G)
Deduction - SUA LIHEAA	October	364.400(G)
Deduction - SUA - H-EAT	October	F.O. 2007-31, F.O. 2007-31A
Food Stamp ET	August	362.310
Household Concept Purchase and Prepare	July	361.200(B)
Household Concept Purchase and Prepare Elderly and Disabled	December	361.200
Income - Excluded Nonrecurring Lump Sum	March	363.230(I)
Income - Excluded Reverse Mortgage	April	363.230(E)
Income - Excluded Vendor Payments	February	363.230(B)
Noncitizen - Battered	June	362.220(B)
Noncitizen - LPR	May	362.220(B)
Questionable Information	July	361.620

Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children

Topic	Month	Related Procedure Policy, 106 CMR:
Asset - Tax Refund	March	204.120(I)
Confidentiality	September	701.320
Domestic Violence Shelter	February	705.350
Employment Development Plan	November	207.110
Exemption - Essential to Care	May	203.100(A)
Income - Noncountable Reverse Mortgage	April	204.250(LL)
Infant Benefit - Layette and Crib	August	705.600
Monthly Reporting	November	702.930
Noncitizen - LPR	May	203.675(A)
Obtaining Benefits	August	701.220
Relocation Benefit	February	705.350
Support Services - Child Care	November	207.210(A)
Teen Parent	February	203.640

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

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

Administrative Memos

The list of available options now includes the memo entitled: *Department of Transitional Assistance Affirmative Action Plan for Fiscal Year 2008/2009.*

Diversity - Plan

Selecting Diversity Plan displays the *Agency Diversity Plan for Fiscal Years 2008/2009.*

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

Policy Online Main Page

The list of options on the Policy Online main page includes the following new options:

- *From the Forms File;*
- *From the Hotline;*
- *Keypoints;* and
- *Quality Corner.*

When selected, the years 2007 and 2008 appear and when selected, the columns for November and December 2007 and January 2008 can be viewed. Each month, these options will be updated with the columns issued in *Transitions*. DTA Online's *Monthly Updates* will continue to be updated and available for reference purposes.

2008 Link

The following Policy Online pages contain a 2008 link:

- *BEACON Online Help Updates;*
- *Field Operations Memos;*
- *From the Forms File;*
- *From the Hotline;*
- *FYIs;*

- *Keypoints;*
- *Quality Corner*
- *State Letters;*
- *TAO E-Mails - Special Procedures;* and
- *Transitions.*

Regulations

A new link entitled *Food Stamp Index of Regulations* appears below the link to the various program regulations. When selected, an index of various Food Stamp program topics and links to the supporting policy references are displayed.

FYI

Massachusetts Minimum Wage Increase

Effective January 1, 2008, the state minimum wage increased to \$8.00 per hour. All required calculation routines in BEA-CON have been updated to reflect this change. AU Managers who work in the Food Stamp Program need to be aware of this minimum wage increase to accurately advise clients (ABAWDs) who are required to perform community service hours to fulfill their Work Program requirement. A Field Operations Memo informing TAO staff about the impact of the minimum wage increase on the FLSA calculation will be issued shortly.

FYI

Subprime Mortgage Crisis - Relocation Benefits

Due to the subprime mortgage foreclosure crisis, some foreclosing lenders or purchasers at foreclosure sales have provided money to tenants in private housing so that they can move out quickly and the building can be put on the market empty. Please be advised that up to \$7500 received from such entities in this circumstance should automatically be considered non-countable relocation benefits for TAFDC, EAEDC and Food Stamp purposes. 106 CMR 204.250(T), 204.140(A), 321.250(T), 321.140(A), 363.230(K)(1) and 363.140(G)(6)(b). Verification of receipt of this relocation benefit would consist of documentation of the foreclosure and that funds have been received by the client from the foreclosing lender or purchaser for the purpose of relocation. If clients receive more than \$7500 and seek to have more than \$7500 treated as a noncountable relocation benefit, in addition to verification noted above, they will need to verify that the total amount claimed as a relocation benefit is being used for qualifying relocation expenses. Please call the Policy Hotline for help in determining what verifications are appropriate and whether funds received in excess of \$7500 can be considered relocation benefits. If it is determined that the funds above the \$7500 threshold do not qualify as relocation benefits or if the client does not seek to have amounts above the \$7500 threshold treated as relocation benefits, generally applicable program asset and lump sum income rules should be applied to determine whether the money is countable.

Once DTA is informed of the receipt of any amount of relocation benefits, the household should be immediately referred to the local Housing Consumer Education Center for housing search services if the household has not already located replacement housing. If an applicant for Emergency Assistance shelter has received a relocation benefit within the twelve months preceding their application, please contact the Policy Hotline for guidance.

“There is no passion to be found in playing small - in settling for a life that is less than what you are capable of living.”

Nelson Mandela