

Transitions

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A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

One year ago we began a series of intensive efforts to stop the increase in the food stamp error rate and to increase program accuracy. We reinstated *Quality Corner* as a regular *Transitions* feature. We reviewed actions taken by other states to see which ones might help in Massachusetts. We developed an excellent training video focused on noncitizen issues, one of the most error-prone areas. We assigned LOQC staff to review all cases containing noncitizens. We made the Food Stamp Household Composition Desk Guide available online and developed an online proration calculation worksheet. We continued monthly error rate meetings with local office directors. And, perhaps most significantly, we committed valuable staff time to a desk review of the majority of federal and combination state and federal food stamp cases.

All of these efforts combined to move us in the right direction. I believe however, that the single most effective undertaking was the desk review. Reviewing over 73,000 cases was no small task. But looking carefully at each case and taking the time to analyze complicated situations resulted in correcting existing errors. It also, I believe, resulted in a better understanding of some admittedly complex rules and meant that future food stamp cases would be handled correctly. All of these efforts combined to lower the food stamp error rate from nearly 10% for the first nine months of the fiscal year to 8.4% for the entire year. I was and am extremely proud and pleased with this effort and I thank everyone involved.

Continued on Page 3

From the Forms File

New Form

13-160-0401-05

13-161-0501-05 (S)

EA-15 (4/2001)

EA Self-Sufficiency Plan/Agreement - Phase I GOAL: To Obtain Permanent Housing

This agreement is signed by the adult members of the EA AU when placed in a Department-approved family shelter. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2001-23 for more information.

Revised Forms

Reminder: AU Managers are reminded to discard the old version of any revised form and use the new revised form.

02-270-0401-05

DOR-CN (Rev. 4/2001)

Cooperation with DOR

The revised DOR-CN notice must be completed when the custodial parent expresses a desire to cooperate with child support and at each eligibility review if the AU has been sanctioned, whether or not he or she wants to cooperate at that time. See Field Operations Memo 2001-22 for more information.

The following two forms are revised. The revised forms have the new address for the Division of Medical Assistance Accident/Trauma Recovery Unit. Please refer to the FYI in this issue of *Transitions* for more information.

02-123-0401-05

A-16 (Rev. 4/2001)

Assignment of Third-Party Recovery

02-175-0401-05

A-17 (Rev. 4/2001)

Assignment Information Sheet

The following forms are now available in Spanish.

02-560-0501-05

DVWR (S) (5/2001)

Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence

June 2001

13-211-0501-05

TES-IC (S) (5/2001)

Informational Contacts

13-216-0501-05

RHAPS (S) (5/2001)

Referral for Housing Assistance Program Services

13-094-0501-05

TESR-3 (S) (Rev. 5/2001)

Acknowledgment of Recipient Responsibilities While in Temporary Emergency Shelter

13-021-0501-05

EA-6 (S) (Rev. 5/2001)

Emergency Assistance Application

13-042-0501-05

NFL-ST (S) (Rev. 5/2001)

Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter

13-062-0501-05

EA-10 (S) (Rev. 5/2001)

Rental Information Form

New Poster

Your Family May Be Eligible for Higher TAFDC Benefits

This poster (English and Spanish) explains that by cooperating with DOR child support enforcement efforts an AU's TAFDC grant will be increased as of the date of cooperation. Posters should be displayed in Transitional Assistance Office reception areas until August 2001. The Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) contact person is Brian Flynn.

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Employment Services Program (ESP), Expansion of Basic Job Search and Structured Job Search Eligibility - TAFDC

TAFDC State Letter 1206

This regulation expands the group of eligible participants in:

- Basic Job Search to include former recipients; and
- Structured Job Search to include all current recipients and all applicants.



It would be great if this message could end right here. Unfortunately, despite all your hard work and despite the success of that work, early indications are that the food stamp error rate may be starting to climb again. Error rates for individual months should not be taken out of context. One case with a particularly high benefit amount can make the error rate in that month appear extremely high. But even taking that into account we are seeing an increase in some of the very types of errors which caused past problems. In particular, household composition errors, particularly households with noncitizens, and errors in cases with known child support income seem to be increasing.

So what next? First, these are early warnings and that is good. We have time to react and to make sure these errors do not get out of control. Second, we have learned from the past and we can utilize what we have learned. Third, we have a number of tools available and we need to take advantage of them.

The desk review guide was a very useful document which focused on particularly error prone areas. Assistant directors and supervisors may want to use it in staff meetings to highlight areas to focus on and to remind staff of past problems. The online Household Composition Desk Guide helps you figure out how to make sure only eligible people receive benefits and that the correct individuals are put in each household. Take the time to review it. The training video on noncitizens continues to be an excellent source of information on a very complicated topic. Staff may want to view it as a refresher and continue to go back to it if they have a particularly complicated situation. *Quality Corner* highlights recently discovered errors and how they can be avoided. It is also an excellent vehicle for a discussion at a staff meeting.

I would prefer that this was strictly a good news message and a thank you for your hard work in this area. But I am optimistic that we have identified this trend early and that we have the tools to make sure it is not only stopped but reversed. So, thank you for past hard work and thank you for your continued support in this critically important area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire McIntire".

Claire McIntire
Commissioner

Cooperation with Child Support Enforcement Requirements

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 2001-22

This memo addresses the DTA and DOR procedural terms of the settlement in *DeJesus, et al. v. Department of Revenue, et al.*

- Notices were mailed to all AUs who are or may be under a child support sanction informing them of their right to have the sanction removed if they cooperate with DOR;
- AU Managers will facilitate contact between the sanctioned custodial parent and DOR;
- The DOR-CN form is used to notify DOR if a sanctioned custodial parent does or does not want to cooperate with DOR. It must be completed at each eligibility review. The form must be sent to DOR within three business days of the date it is completed;
- If the DOR-CN indicates the custodial parent wants to cooperate, the AU Manager must track the response from DOR for up to 70 days;
- Within 70 days DOR will advise the TAO if the AU is cooperating or continues to be noncooperative or if DOR is unable to schedule a court date;
- If DOR is unable to schedule a court date or the TAO receives no response from DOR by day 70, the custodial parent is deemed to have cooperated, the sanction must be removed and the custodial parent restored to the grant as of the 70th day (if no other sanction is in effect); and
- If the custodial parent is cooperating, the AU Manager must remove the sanction and increase the grant as of the date of cooperation (if no other sanction is in effect).

The revised DOR-CN and the DOR Regional Counsel list are attached to the memo. Copies of DOR notices issued to the custodial parent or the TAO are attached to the memo.

Gambino v. McIntire Lawsuit - TAFDC

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 2001-24

- A Superior Court judge in the *Gambino v. McIntire* lawsuit has ruled that it is unlawful for the Department to withhold earnings disregards from the grants of families headed by individuals with a felony conviction for the possession, use or distribution of a controlled substance.
- Beginning May 1, 2001, PACES will provide the 30 and 1/3 or 30 and 1/2 disregards, the work-related expense deduction and the dependent care deduction when calculating the TAFDC grant of families headed by a drug felon. (These cases have an Option Code "T" in block 43 on the PID.)
- BEACON Release 2.0 will also accommodate this change.
- EAEDC cases are not affected by this decision.

FYI

Clarification of Addresses for A-16, A-17, and TPLI Forms

The Division of Medical Assistance, Accident/Trauma Recovery Unit has been receiving TPLI and other long-term-care forms that they do not handle. This is a reminder that only the *Assignment of Third-Party Recovery* (A-16) and the *Assignment Information Sheet* (A-17) forms are to be sent to the new address. These forms are being revised to show the new address. A supply will be sent to the TAOs as soon as they are available. The address for the A-16 and A-17 forms is:

**Division of Medical Assistance
Accident/Trauma Recovery Unit
P.O. Box 15205
Worcester, MA 01615-9906**

Please continue to send the *Third Party Liability Indicator* (TPLI) forms to the address on the form:

**Third Party Liability Unit
P. O. Box 9209
Boston, MA 02209**

EA Self-Sufficiency Plan / Agreement for AUs Receiving EA Temporary Emergency Shelter Benefits

EA
Field Operations Memo 2001-23

This memo provides procedures for completing the *EA Self-Sufficiency Plan / Agreement - Phase I* (EA-15) form with an EA AU as a condition of eligibility for temporary emergency shelter benefits. The EA-15 states what must be done while in shelter.

- EA shelter applicants must sign an EA-15 before placement. If the EA applicant does not sign the EA-15, the AU is ineligible for temporary emergency shelter benefits. Advise the AU refusing to sign the form that shelter benefits will be terminated and the AU will be ineligible for shelter for 12 months.
- All current EA shelter recipients must sign an EA-15 by May 31, 2001 (additional time may be approved by your Regional Director). If the EA recipient refuses to sign the EA-15, the information is sent to the Noncompliance Committee for a decision on non-compliance.
- Each TAO determines the best way to ensure timely completion of the EA-15.
- This form is the precursor to the three-part EA Self-Sufficiency Plan.
- This form lists some of the activities and responsibilities of the adult members of the EA AU while the family is in shelter, including hotel/motels.

**THE
GOAL
OF
TAFDC!**



BEACON Release 2.0 Pre-Conversion Procedures

All
Field Operations Memo 2001-26 A

This Field Operations Memo informed TAO Staff about procedures leading up to the planned conversion period (close of business June 14, 2001 through June 20, 2001).

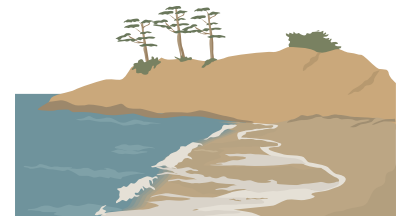
Field Operations Memo 2001-26 A gave procedures for the pre-conversion period including:

- continuing activities outlined in the BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities Phase IV Field Operations Memo 2001-21;
- approving or denying pending applications/reapplications;
- completing ongoing AU maintenance transactions;
- tracking all activities that could not be entered by June 14, 2001 using the Pre-Conversion Tracking form;
- entering residential facilities on BEACON Release 1.0 which will be converted to BEACON Release 2.0 and, after conversion, entering the corresponding information on Residential tab in BEACON Release 2.0;
- not entering Monthly Reporting codes (MSRE) or Monthly Reporting income changes in PACES for the June Report Month; and
- not scheduling cash reevaluations for the months of June and July.

BEACON Stress Test IV

All
Field Operations Memo
2001-25

This Field Operations Memo informed TAO Staff about the BEACON Stress Test that took place on May 15, 2001. The Stress Test was used to evaluate response time, user capacity and time needed to complete various activities on BEACON. This Stress Test occurred in selected TAOs.



SUMMER!



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Every

Job

is

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Good

Job

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 004

All

The following changes were made to Chapter II, Section A:

- two views, “Validation of Addresses” and “Categorically Eligible NPA FS AUs,” were added; and
- definitions of two views, “Eligibility Explorer Interviews in Progress” and “FSWP Status Review Client Turns 18,” were revised.

The following change was made to Chapter IV:

- Section D, Funerals and Burials was added.

The following changes were made to Chapter XIII, Section G:

- completing the DOR-CN form, tracking DOR’s response for 70 days, and noticing to and from DOR as related to the *DeJesus* lawsuit settlement on child-support-sanctioned Assessed Persons were added;
- attaching pertinent documents such as birth certificates, marriage or divorce papers, death certificates and the signed absent parent affidavit to the T-A34/36 form, which is sent/faxed, was added; and
- subtracting \$90 from monthly child support payment received on behalf of a family cap child before an amount is entered as un-earned income on the Other Income Status window was clarified.

The following changes were made to Chapter XVI, Section F:

- information on terminating Monthly Reporting was added;
- an explanation of retrospective budgeting was added;
- processing Monthly Reports was revised;
- entering Monthly Reporting information was added;
- information on TAFDC Monthly Reporting and food stamp benefits was added; and
- an explanation of diverted and closed Monthly Reporting AUs was revised.

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two types of problems that have been recent sources of error: Child Support Deductions and Food Stamp Work Registration.

Child Support Deduction

In a recent error, an AU closed and reopened. After the opening, the GRT-1 screen showed a child support deduction – money paid by the household in child support to someone else: code D in the Asset Block (Block 10). While verification of the child support deduction is required, it was not done. Instead, the deduction amount remained from a prior stay on TAFDC when it was appropriately allowed. In addition, the AU Manager knew the father was no longer working, and therefore was unable to meet his obligation.

What Can An AU Manager Do?

The system does not ‘zero out’ previous deduction amounts when an AU closes. When the AU reopens you MUST verify that there is an obligation and that payments are being made prior to authorizing the deduction. Failing to do so will result in an incorrect payment. If there is no longer an obligation or if no payments are being made, ‘zero out’ the amount of the previous deduction.

It is also important to note that recipients are only allowed this deduction if the payments are being made. This is different from SUA and shelter deductions where the deduction is allowed even if the payment (rent, for example) is not made but only incurred.

Food Stamp Work Registration

Prior to the most recent recertification a 17-year-old dropped out of school. Because he was no longer exempt from Food Stamp Employment and Training, a new work registration form, completed by the head of the household, had to be signed for all members in the household. In addition, the 17-year-old must participate in the job search program or show good cause for not participating. This MUST be documented in the AU record. Because he is not yet 18, there is no required ABAWD activity.

What Can An AU Manager Do?

At EVERY change in circumstances (for example, age changes, changes in food stamp employment and training exemption, disability determination, and pregnancy) be sure to complete a new work program registration to be signed by the head of the household. When required, include participation information in the AU record. When not required (by good cause), include documentation of that in the AU record. Remember, work registration forms must be completed, signed and included in the AU record.

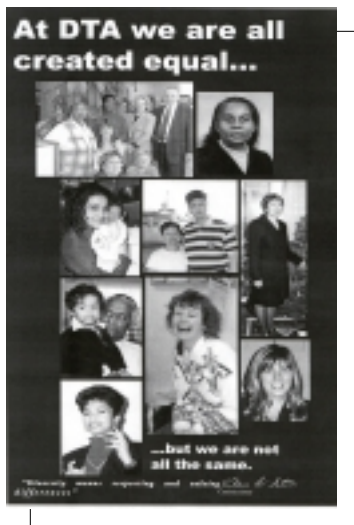
These two problems are more common and contribute more to the error rate than you might think. The first error alone represents more than \$200,000 in food stamp benefits issued incorrectly.



FYI

DTA Workplace Diversity Posters

These poster were created to celebrate and promote diversity in our workplace. They are being distributed throughout the department this month. The photos are of people and family of various DTA employees, some taken during various diversity celebrations throughout the department this past March.



FYI

Food Stamp Elderly/Disabled Indicator

It is extremely important that a food stamp AU is properly coded or proper data entries made for the system to recognize that the food stamp AU contains an elderly/disabled member. When a food stamp AU contains an elderly/disabled member the food stamp AU:

- is exempt from the Gross Income eligibility test;
- is entitled to a Medical Expense Deduction in excess of the \$35 threshold; and
- is entitled to an uncapped Shelter Deduction.

The food stamp policy cite on the pertinent Elderly or Disabled standards is at 106 CMR 361.210.

Obvious error implications in either food stamp eligibility or benefit issuance may result from erroneous coding or improper data entry. AUs must be identified as containing such a member, if applicable.

In PACES, be sure to correctly code AUs with elderly (age 60 or over) or disabled (RSDI Disability, SSI, Veteran-related, MA/DA, certain DES-determined disability, etc.) AU members. Current PACES instructions are located in the *PACES User's Guide*, Volume 1, Chapter IV-20.

In BEACON, an Assessed Person's Date of Birth entry will generate the proper food stamp actions for those APs age 60 or over. A "Yes" response to Disability in the Non financials Interview Q & A Navigator or directly accessing the Disability window will allow for proper data entry of acceptable food stamp disability reasons. (See *User's Guide*, Chapter XIII, Section H.) Proper data entry in the Medical Expenses window will identify medical expenses incurred by the elderly or disabled food stamp AU member. (See *User's Guide* Chapter XIV, Section K.)

From the Hotline

- Q. I have a TAFDC AU consisting of a grandmother, who is the grantee, her teen-parent daughter and her daughter's one-year-old son. The teen parent is refusing to attend school and is therefore sanctioned. Can the teen-parent's child remain on TAFDC with the grandmother? Does it make any difference if the grandmother had legal guardianship?
- A. The teen-parent's child cannot remain on TAFDC in the grandmother's AU if the teen parent is refusing to attend school. Once the teen parent refuses to attend school and is therefore sanctioned, you must wait 30 days before you close the teen-parent's child. The grandmother can remain TAFDC-eligible as long as her daughter remains in her home; however, the grandmother must meet the work requirement, unless otherwise exempt. It makes no difference if the grandmother has legal guardianship. See 106 CMR 203.610 (A) (4) (b) (2).
- Q. I sanctioned a recipient for failing to comply with a cash program requirement. How long must the FS income remain on PACES or the Food Stamp Attributed Amount on BEACON 2.0?
- A. The countable sanction amount will be used in the calculation of food stamp benefits for each month that the cash case remains in a sanction status. The countable sanctioned amount must remain on file until the sanction has been cured, the disqualification penalty removed, the reason for the sanction no longer exists or the sanction cannot be cured. See 106 CMR 363.220 (C) (5) and Field Operations Memo 96-32, *BEACON User's Guide* XIV-D 3.
- Q. Does being in DSS custody make a teen parent ineligible for TAFDC and placement in a TLP?
- A. No. Provided no foster care payments are being made for the teen parent, being in DSS custody does not make a teen parent ineligible for TAFDC and placement in a TLP. If the teen parent meets all TAFDC eligibility requirements, she is eligible for a cash grant and placement in a TLP.
- Q. I have a combination food stamp AU (FS/SSFSP) due to noncitizen status. All AU members are receiving TAFDC. For shelter proration purposes, is TAFDC considered income?
- A. The shelter cost must be prorated if the shelter cost is paid by or

billed to the SSFSP member and the SSFSP member has income. **Either earned or unearned income, including a cash assistance grant, is considered income to the SSFSP member.**

