

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

Quality Corner	2
From the Forms File	3
From the Hotline	4
Work Requirement Exemption Changes	4
Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) Expansion of Vocational Education Programs	5
Rest Home Per Diem Rate Changes Effective January 1, 2008	5
2008 Health and Human Services (HHS) Poverty Guidelines	6
Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program Expansion	6
Revisions to the NFL-9 and NFL-ST and Introduction of the NFL-ST/CA	6
New Initiative Memo: Cambridge College Courses: Human Services and Bridge to Community College	7
New Initiative Memo: TAFDC/ESP Southbridge Transportation Initiative	7
New Initiative Memo: TAFDC - Revised Orientation Session	7

Continued on Page 3

From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

March promises to be an exciting month of planning and progress for all of us at DTA. Our efforts are attracting positive attention and I'm so pleased with all of our accomplishments.

In commenting on our efforts to improve access and customer service, a recent *Boston Globe* editorial ("Speaking the Same Language," 2/20/2008) mentions, "The state's early education agency would be well served by looking to the Department of Transitional Assistance, which has built bilingual capacity, employed a broad range of communications tools, and established a network of translators ..." Congratulations to all of you who have helped increase our multi-language services!

We have also received media support for our satellite offices and Food Stamp Outreach Centers launched on February 7th, most notably from the *Somerville Journal* and Univision. Below is a brief update on this outstation initiative:

- Cross-program full-service satellite offices are up and running in Northampton, Athol, Waltham and Somerville.
- Food Stamp Outreach Centers were recently opened to the public in Boston, Lynn, Chelsea and Fall River. These offices are co-located within senior centers, health centers, and other local organizations. By sharing the space of our community partners, we're also able to share our knowledge and expertise when helping clients.

Each of these locations is accessible by public transportation. For up-to-the-minute progress and details on these outstations, go to DTA Online and select "Latest News/Photo Gallery," or visit www.mass.gov/dta.

Continued on Page 2

While we're on the subject of media, this month we're celebrating the 500,000th Common Intake application through Virtual Gateway along with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). Virtual Gateway has become an important tool for our Department, particularly for the Food Stamp Program. Since our launch in 2005, approximately 10,000 Food Stamp applications have been submitted through the Virtual Gateway. Many of these (almost 3,000) have been received over the last three months, since our consumer-face application launch began. This means that we are currently receiving about 15% of all of our Food Stamp Virtual Gateway applications through the web's consumer-face. This increase is the result of system enhancements made by the Department in collaboration with EOHHS and Deloitte, as well as the cooperation of many community partners. Even more encouraging are the reports I hear about your efforts to assist clients and other service providers in this endeavor. With the availability of this online application tool, coupled with your hard work, the Virtual Gateway shows a great deal of potential for our Department and continues to be a terrific way to increase our overall Food Stamp participation rate.

Also this month, representatives from our Secretariat will be gathering with hundreds of government, corporate, and nonprofit partners to share best practices and begin coordinating a plan to reduce hunger in the Commonwealth. We all know that hunger cannot be eliminated by Food Stamp benefits alone. For this reason, I look forward to seeing representatives from each TAO at the Statewide Hunger Summit on Thursday, March 27th from 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. at the University of Massachusetts, Boston Campus Center. For those who are interested, please speak with your supervisor or manager. TAO directors were given separate instructions on how to RSVP for this event by the March 18th deadline.

I'm thrilled to announce our keynote speakers for the Summit will be Governor Deval Patrick and Congressman James McGovern. The day will also feature a panel discussion with local and national experts on hunger; informational kiosks from a variety of organizations; and working groups to address hunger through nutrition and programs, access and technology, advocacy, and marketing.

Further plans to reduce hunger in the state may also include Food Stamp Program regulation changes. To augment our Food Stamp

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss a common error involving earnings. The error occurred in an NPA case.

NPA Earnings

The food stamp household consisted of a mother and two children, both under 18 years old. One of the children received RSDI based on the death of her father. At the time of the last recertification in June 2007, RSDI was the only income reported. The mother had been terminated from her job in May 2007 and was not eligible for Unemployment Compensation benefits. She claimed to be meeting her expenses on the small RSDI check and free shelter; she reported that her grandparents were paying the rent. The household was subsequently certified for six months as a change reporting case.

QC determined through a BEACON match that the client became employed in late June. During the QC interview, the client informed the QC reviewer that as of July, her grandparents were no longer paying her rent. Since the household was certified as a change reporting case, the new job and earnings should have been reported. Despite the new

FYI - Adjusted Heating/Cooling SUA	8
FYI - Changes to DTA Online	8
FYI - Changes to EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage	8

shelter deduction, a significant overpayment error occurred based on the unreported earnings.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

There are two ways that the AU Manager could have prevented this error, even though the client did not report her new earnings. At the time of the last recertification, the case should have been certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting, since the client had a history of earnings (see 106 CMR 366.110(C)). Designating the case as Universal Semiannual Reporting would have prevented the error since the earnings that subsequently caused the error were less than the gross income limit for her household size and would not have had to be reported. AU Managers must determine the food stamp reevaluation type based on case characteristics and circumstances. For more information on assigning food stamp reevaluation types, see

Field Operations Memo 2006-38 and 106 CMR 366.110.

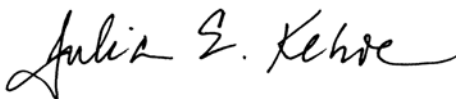
The error could also have been prevented if the New Hire Match that appeared in BEACON had been acted on promptly, as the match appeared two months prior to the review month. AU Managers are reminded of the importance of checking the Match History tab, especially at application, reapplication and recertification. It is also important to regularly check the External Agency Matches view to ensure case accuracy and avoid payment errors.

From the Commissioner (cont)

participation rate, we're exploring updates that will extend certain certification periods, increase the medical expense deduction and expand the list of those eligible for work program exemptions.

Thank you as always for your efforts to improve customer service, increase opportunities for economic self-sufficiency, and reduce homelessness. By making sure our clients leave DTA offices in a better place than when they first arrived, you are making a significant contribution to the lives of many.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

From the Forms File

Revised Form

17-300-0208-05

CVTR1 (Rev. 2/2008)

TransAction Associates Client Verification and Transportation Request Form

The name of this form has been changed from *Access to Jobs Customer Verification and Jobs Transportation Request Form* to *TransAction Associates Client Verification and Transportation Request Form*. Please discard the old version and use the revised form.

From the Hotline

- Q.** My food stamp client who is elderly and disabled is living with her spouse who is employed. The spouse is paying for health insurance through his employer. Can the wife's portion of the health insurance payment be deducted as an excess medical expense, and if so, how do I determine the amount that is deductible?
- A.** Yes, medical expense deductions in excess of \$35 per month are allowed as a deduction when incurred by an elderly or disabled food stamp client, per 106 CMR 361.210.

In determining how much of the insurance payment to deduct, use the amount that would be equivalent to one individual's full monthly health insurance premium. In other words, rather than deducting the insurance company's increment for one additional person, deduct the full amount that the health insurance company charges for a single insured individual.

For more information on excess medical deductions, refer to 106 CMR 364.400(C).

- Q.** I have a food stamp client who is a Legal Permanent Resident (LPR). She was granted her status on May 27, 1998 and is considered a "window immigrant" for food stamp purposes. The client lives with her niece who was also granted LPR status on the same day. This means that both individuals are not subject to the food stamp sponsor deeming regulations.

Now that this client has lost her job, she is applying for TAFDC for herself and her niece. Can I apply the "window immigrant" policy to the TAFDC Program as well?

- A.** Yes. Any TAFDC client whose LPR status was granted between December 19, 1997 and May 31, 1998 may also be considered a "window immigrant" for TAFDC purposes. Most of these individuals received their LPR status using the non-binding I-134 Affidavit of Support. LPRs who were sponsored by family members or other individuals and who have an LPR status granted date before June 1, 1998 are not subject to TAFDC sponsor deeming regulations. Any noncitizen adult or child who falls into this category must not be asked for affidavit of support documents.

For more information, refer to the "Window Immigrants" FYI in the June, 2006 issue of *Transitions*.

For more information on the noncitizen LPR status in the TAFDC Program, refer to 106 CMR 203.675(A).

Work Requirement Exemption Changes

FS
State Letter 1331
Field Operations Memo
2008-2

State Letter 1331, effective January 7, 2008, clarifies several criteria used to determine exemptions from work requirements in the Food Stamp Work Program (FS/WP) and the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program (FS/ET). These clarifications are as follows.

- A person older than 59 years of age is exempt from FS/ET.
- A person living in a household where a household member is under age 18, even if that household member is not eligible for food stamps, is exempt from both FS/ET and FS/WP.

- A parent or other household member who is responsible for the care of a dependent child under age six or of an incapacitated person is exempt from both FS/ET and FS/WP, even if the child or incapacitated person does not live in the same household.

Field Operations Memo 2008-02 explains how to apply these criteria in determining exemption from food stamp work requirements.

Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) Expansion of Vocational Education Programs

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2008-6

Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) will offer TAFDC clients Customer Service, Culinary Arts or Careers in Medical Office Training Programs beginning February 2008. To strengthen the skills required for employment in the specified area, these programs also include Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) or Adult Basic Education (ABE), as needed. Entrance criteria are estab-

lished by JVS. Clients may begin services as soon as they are ready to participate. This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about:

- the vocational education programs offered by JVS;
- where the JVS programs are being offered; and
- follow-up services offered by JVS.

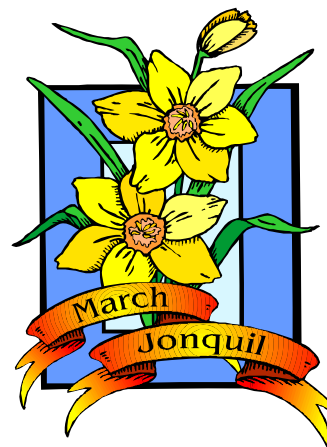
Rest Home Per Diem Rate Changes Effective January 1, 2008

EAEDC
Field Operations Memo 2008-7

The Division of Health Care Finance and Policy (DHCFP) has issued new public per diem rates for Massachusetts licensed rest homes effective January 1, 2008. Additionally, DHCFP has approved a special adjustment rate for December 1, 2007 through December 31, 2007.

This memo:

- identifies EAEDC clients whose rest home's per diem rate has changed and the corresponding changes that need to be made in BEACON;
- provides instructions on how to change per diem rates in BEACON and recalculate benefits as a result of the rate change; and
- provides instructions on how to manually calculate a special adjustment rate retroactive benefit for December 1, 2007 through December 31, 2007.



2008 HHS Poverty Guidelines

TAFDC, EA and FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-8

The Health and Human Services (HHS) Poverty Guidelines are used to calculate the eligibility standards in the following programs:

1. TAFDC: *Income from the Parent(s) of a Teen Parent Under Age 18*;
2. EA: *EA Eligibility Standard*; and
3. Food Stamps: *Gross Monthly Categorical Eligibility Income Standards*.

Effective 2/1/2008, BEACON was updated with the increased eligibility standards.

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program Expansion

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-9

Due to the importance of ensuring that clients are enrolled in an activity that can lead to economic self-sufficiency, as well as meet their work program requirement, the marketing of the FSS Program is being expanded to a new group of clients. This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about this next group of clients.



Revisions to the NFL-9 and NFL-ST and Introduction of the NFL-ST/CA

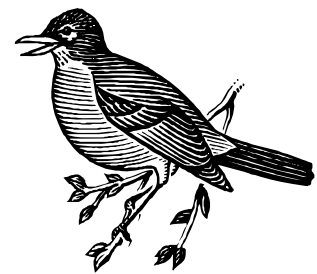
EA

Field Operations Memo
2008-10

There are three EA termination notices that are used to terminate temporary emergency shelter benefits:

- the NFL-9 is used for termination reasons not related to noncompliance;
- the NFL-ST is used for termination reasons related to a second instance of noncompliance; and
- the NFL-ST/CA (a new notice) is used only when the termination reason is because of criminal activity.

All three notices allow additional space for detailed information (who, what, where and when) related to the termination reason selected.



**New Initiative:
Cambridge College
Courses: Human Services
and Bridge to Community
College**

TAFDC

Cambridge College is offering three courses for the Spring 2008 semester for Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) clients who are currently residing in shelters in the Boston area. Cambridge College will offer the following courses in Human Services: Self-Care for Helping Professionals, College Writing I and Principles and Process of Adult Learning.

Cambridge College is also offering a program (Bridge to Community College) for those teen parents enrolled in the Young Parents Program (YPP) who are currently earning their General Educational Development (GED) or high school diploma.

These courses are scheduled to begin March 3, 2008.

The purpose of this memo is to inform TAO Staff about:

- the courses offered at Cambridge College;
- marketing the courses to our clients; and
- enrolling clients in these programs.

New Initiative: TAFDC/ESP Southbridge Transportation Initiative

TAFDC

Since the Southbridge TAO client population is located in an area that lacks public transportation, this TAO will be the focus of a transportation initiative. Beginning March 3, 2008 TransAction Associates will assist clients served by the Southbridge TAO with transportation by:

- providing a shuttle van to transport clients to their ESP activities;
- providing gas card bonuses to clients who drive carpools; and
- helping employed or soon-to-be-employed clients keep their cars on the road.

The purpose of this memo is to inform TAO staff about:

- transportation services TransAction Associates will provide to our clients in the Southbridge TAO; and
- making referrals to TransAction Associates.

While this new initiative is taking place, TransAction Associates will continue to provide services to our other TAOs.

New Initiative: TAFDC- Revised Orientation Session

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2007-45 introduced TAO staff to orientation sessions. As a result of feedback from clients and TAO staff, beginning February 11, 2008 a revised orientation session will be tested at the Newmarket Square TAO. The revised orientation session will focus on participation and the various ESP activities clients may use to meet work participation and become self-sufficient. All other TAOs should continue to use the current orientation session described in Field Operations Memo 2007-45.

“There are two ways of spreading the light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.”

Edith Wharton

FYI

Adjusted Heating/Cooling SUA

The HCSUA was increased from \$534 to \$551, effective February 1, 2008. Benefits have been recalculated to affect March food stamp benefits. Additionally, if appropriate, retroactive benefits for February have been issued. The following special message was entered into the BEACON Narratives tab: “Special Batch -Heating/Cooling SUA Adjustment. Benefits recalculated and February retroactive benefits issued in March, if appropriate.”

Clients have received notices similar to those received during the October FS COLA. As with the October FS COLA, these notices will not be available in Document History. No AU Manager action is required.

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

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

Administration and Finance – Human Resource Management – Human Resource Frequently Used Forms

Selecting the option Human Resource Frequently Used Forms displays the following form options:

Bilingual Differential Form;

GIC Insurance Enrollment and Change Form (Form-1);

New Central Office Employee Checklist; and

Notice of Separation (Form ES-53).

Diversity - Events

The Diversity Event for March is entitled *National Women’s History Month*.



FYI

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

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

Initiatives – Free Tax Help

A new title, *Initiatives*, and option, *Free Tax Help*, appear on the left side of the DTA homepage. When selected, information about the Earned Income Tax Credit and Earned Income Credit (EITC/EIC) is displayed. Links to MassCashBack, an EITC brochure (available in English and Spanish), DOR and the IRS are also listed.

Key Resources – Reporting Fraud

A form entitled *Suspected Fraud Reporting Form* is available for reporting suspected fraud in a public assistance program. Instructions are provided on the form to either fax or mail the form to the Fraud Investigations Unit in Central Office.

