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Dear Fellow Employees,

Last year at this time, I wrote to you about serving our clients with respect and courtesy. I continue to believe that providing quality customer service is not only personally satisfying but also makes us more effective. In fact, how we relate to our clients is so critical that we, as employees in state government, are approaching this challenge from several different angles. We are making strides in three areas: our direct interactions with clients, our interactions with other state organizations and even in the structure of our Central Office.



The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

Martin Luther King Jr.,
Strength to Love

Good customer service begins with our client's first contact with DTA. This contact can be by telephone, face to face or even through the Internet. Often, those in need of our benefits and services encounter more than the usual number of challenges before coming to us for help. How we respond to their needs is important. When families walk through our local office doors, they may be required by regulation to engage in a number of different activities and are asked to comply with requests for personal information. Whether they are completing paternity forms or furnishing bank statements, we need to remain responsive and respectful. We should be especially mindful that those who are of limited English proficiency may face even more difficult barriers in dealing with us. I understand that quality customer service may be easier to talk about than to practice, especially when you may sometimes be treated with less courtesy than you deserve. But, generally this approach leads to a smoother, less stressful workday.

Creating a customer-friendly focus is a priority we demonstrate beyond the boundaries of our direct client interactions. This focus is also evident in the way we collaborate with other state agencies and programs. The Child Nutrition Access Project (CNAP) is an example of this effort. Sponsored by a federal grant, CNAP is leading the way in putting customer needs and services first. Electronic and data coordination between the National School Breakfast and Lunch Program (NSBLP), the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program and the Food Stamp Program has improved access to each of these distinct yet complementary nutrition organizations. Information-sharing has also increased their enrollments and participation levels. The success of CNAP fosters our continued shift away from an agency-centered orientation towards a client-centered approach.

It is my hope that this shift in focus is also understood by all of us working here at Central Office. For us, you are our customers. Our Central Office reorganization is part of my effort to maintain quality customer service standards. Organizing staff into three major programmatic areas (Cash Assistance and Full Engagement, Housing and Homelessness, and Food Stamps) not only streamlines our agency, but also presents a more enduring, customer-friendly focus. Questions arising from you in the local TAOs or the public regarding policy and procedural issues can be directed to program experts within each area. Over time, these program experts will be better equipped to respond to inquiries for information and better able to train staff when modifications to programs are necessary. Job postings and interviews for the reorganization are currently ongoing, and I will continue to keep you apprised of further developments as they happen. I also plan to regularly assess and continue advancing the effectiveness of this redesign.

In the coming months, I look forward to sharing further progress in all of the areas mentioned in this letter. As always, thank you for your continued hard work and dedicated service to our clients.

Sincerely,

John Wagner, Commissioner

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This month we will review two different types of errors – one caused by using outdated SDX information and the other by entering the wrong week's wages. Each could have been prevented.

SSI Benefit Amount

On her application, the recipient reported that she received \$564.40 SSI for her son. The AU Manager verified the SSI amount through SDX. Unfortunately, the amount on SDX was last updated five months previously, and showed an SSI amount of \$506.16. The AU Manager used this amount in calculating the food stamps benefits, resulting in an overpayment.

What Can an AU Manager Do?


Whenever there is a discrepancy between what the recipient reports and the amount on the SDX, be sure to look at the date of the last update and remember that a date within the last 45 days is considered current. On the other hand, if the date is more than 45 days earlier, the AU Manager needs to do an overnight SVES inquiry to determine the correct amount.

Wrong Week's Wages Used

A recipient was recertified in the review month, and she correctly submitted four pay stubs. Regrettably, the AU Manager entered incorrect information into the system. She omitted one pay stub and inadvertently entered another one twice. As you know, Universal Semi-Annual Reporting (USAR) provides error protection for most changes after the recertification, but only if the recertification itself was done correctly. Since the wages were incorrectly entered at the time of a recertification, this caused an error.

What Can an AU Manager Do?


Since entering the correct amount of earned income is crucial to determining the correct benefit amount, the AU Manager should double-check the amount entered. If an error is made at the time of recertification, the error will likely remain for at least six months. Because the Quality Control sample is drawn every month, the case has many more chances to be selected and discovered as an error.

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The answers below are in response to inquiries related to State Letter 1275, Food Stamp Farm Bill of 2002: Income and Asset Exclusions.

- Q.** My food stamp recipient told me that her uncle is willing to pay her landlord \$300 towards her total \$600 monthly rental obligation? Do I count any of this money as income?
- A.** No. If a portion of your food stamp recipient's rent is being paid directly to a landlord, then the gain or benefit is considered an excluded vendor payment, and it is not countable as income. Only the housing expense that your recipient continues to incur (\$300) is used in the shelter deduction when calculating the food stamp benefit amount. Refer to 106 CMR 363.230 (B) for more details.
- Q.** My food stamp recipient is also receiving TAFDC for herself and her two children. How would the circumstances described in the previous question affect the recipient's TAFDC grant?
- A.** Since your TAFDC recipient is paying a portion of her own rent, her uncle's payment to the landlord does not impact the amount of her TAFDC grant. Refer to 106 CMR 204.250 (AA).
- Q.** If the recipient's uncle decides to pay his niece's entire rental obligation to the landlord, would this change the food stamp benefit calculation?
- A.** Yes. If the uncle begins paying the entire rental obligation of \$600, then the recipient is no longer paying any shelter expense. Enter zero as the shelter expense on BEACON to correctly calculate the food stamp benefit amount.
- Q.** What will happen to the recipient's TAFDC benefit when the uncle begins paying the entire \$600 rental amount to the landlord?
- A.** If the recipient's uncle begins paying the full amount of rent for his niece, then an income-in-kind deduction must be made. The income-in-kind rent/mortgage deduction for TAFDC recipients is \$126.30 for a heated facility, or \$102.00 for an unheated facility, per month. For more information on income-in-kind deductions in the TAFDC program, refer to 106 CMR 204.510.

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Clarification of Payment of Funeral and Burial Expenses

All

[Field Operations Memo 2004-14](#)

This Field Operations Memo clarifies when funeral and burial expenses may be paid for cremation services.

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Clarifications to Child-Care Services

TAFDC

[Field Operations Memo 2004-17](#)

This memo addresses the following:

- The AU Manager completes an initial authorization to establish the Transitional Child Care (TCC) services. The CCR&R will determine continuing eligibility thereafter.
- Child-care services will be authorized for four weeks when the applicant/ recipient is curing a sanction.
- Child-care services can be authorized through the CCR&R when the recipient is participating in an ESP component for less than 20 hours per week. The recipient is eligible for In-Home Child Care or Relative Care, which are not provided through family-based child-care centers.

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Disability Window Discrepancies

EAEDC

[Field Operations Memo 2004-19](#)

Questions have arisen about information displayed on the Disability window and information received by the TAO from the Professional Review Organization (PRO). This memo informs TAO staff how to resolve discrepant information.

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DTA/DMR Food Stamp Outreach Initiative

FS

[Field Operations Memo 2004-15](#)

This memo provides details regarding the DTA and Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) Food Stamp Outreach partnership. In early April 2004, DMR workers across the state began helping DMR clients residing in group homes apply for food stamp benefits.

This memo identifies the targeted DMR client population and discusses the food stamp eligibility rules for residents of group living arrangements. It also describes the streamlined DTA/DMR food stamp application process, including the responsibilities of both DMR and DTA staff. Finally, special procedures for verifying DMR client information and issuing EBT cards for DMR clients are addressed.

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Paternity Affidavit

TAFDC

[A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 052](#)

The Revere TAO was inadvertently excluded from the listing of DOR contacts for genetic marker testing and affidavits.

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Shelter-to-Housing Placement Program (S2H)

EA

[Field Operations Memo 2004-20](#)

The Department, in collaboration with the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) Providers, is proposing an innovative, one-time use of EA funds to assist in the transition of homeless families out of shelter into permanent housing by the end of this fiscal year (FY'04). This program is called The Shelter-to-Housing (S2H) Placement Program. The HAP Provider will receive \$6,000 for stabilization services for each family that signs a lease and gets the keys to an unsubsidized housing unit by June 30, 2004. The family must have sufficient income to maintain the housing unit

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Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program

All

[Field Operations Memo 2004-18](#)

The System User's Guide Update 157

[Policy Online - Related Systems Information](#)

This memo transmits the following information:

- VIS has replaced the Alien Status Verification Index (ASVI) component with a web-based Customer Processing System (CPS).
- Procedures for accessing CPS and verifying a noncitizen's immigration status which are located in Policy Online under Related Systems Information, must now be followed.
- This web-based method of requesting information will replace the SAVE-1 form when all AU Managers receive access.

This update transmits the following information:

- Volume 5 of the Subsystems User's Guide, Chapter II: Alien Status Verification Index System (ASVI) is now obsolete.

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TAFDC – Sixty-Day Work Search Period and Work Program Procedures

TAFDC

[Field Operations Memo 2004-16](#)

This memo clarifies the procedures AU Managers must follow during the 60-day work search period whenever a grantee is work program required.

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Verification Guidelines for Noncitizens

TAFDC and FS

[State Letter 1278](#)

This State Letter clarifies that when a noncitizen applying for TAFDC or FS indicates an inability or unwillingness to provide information about or acceptable verification of a noncitizen's eligibility status, or to provide, or apply for, an SSN due to immigration status, that individual is ineligible. The Department shall not continue efforts to obtain documentation.

TAFDC and FS eligibility must be determined for the remaining members of the AU who verify an eligible noncitizen status.

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New Brochure

17-150-0304-05
17-151-0404-05(S)
WPIB (3/2004)
TAFDC Work Program Requirement

This brochure tells the TAFDC applicant/recipient about the Work Program. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2004-16 for more information.

The following Emergency Assistance (EA) forms are now available in Spanish.

02-204-0404-05
TES-TR-1(S)(Rev. 4/2004)
Notice of Shelter Transfer

02-281-0404-05
TES-TR-3 (S)(Rev. 4/2004)
Notice of Transfer Due to Shelter Termination

13-042-0404-05
NFL-ST(S)(Rev. 4/2004)
Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter


02-157-0404-05
NFL-9 (S)(Rev. 4/2004)
Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services

13-076-0404-05
TES-WN-13 (S)(Rev. 4/2004)
Warning Notice of Noncompliance

13-211-0404-05
TES-IC (S) (Rev. 4/2004)
Informational Contacts

Revised Form

Please be advised that the DMA MassHealth Benefits Request (MBR) is revised (with a revision date of 4/04). AU Managers must destroy old MBRs dated earlier and reorder the new one from Document Production.

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BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised.

Added:

- Warnings, Edits and Messages (WEM)
- WEM Work Requirements
- WEM Work Requirements TAFDC Tab

Revised:

- Assets Q & A Navigator
- Clients with Sanctions
- Disability
- SSI Tracking
- Standard Utility Allowance
- Work Requirements
- Work Requirements TAFDC Tab

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New Format of *Transitions* and Redesign of the Department's Intranet Website

New format of *Transitions* and Redesign of the Department's Intranet Website

This month you will see a new format and design of *Transitions*. The new design allows you to navigate through *Transitions* easily by selecting a topic listed at the top of the page or by selecting a topic from the "Choose Area" button at the bottom of the page. On pages containing more than one summary, you can return to the top of the page by selecting the "Back to Top" button. We would like your input on both the format design and navigational flow of the new version of *Transitions*.

Last month you were told about the redesign of the Department's Internet website. The new Internet site became available in early April. Now, an initiative has started to redesign the Department's intranet site.

Representatives from the various units in Central Office are participating in this project. The goals of the redesign effort are to simplify the navigational process, provide DTA staff with current and useful information and link to other relevant websites and topics.

We are asking for your help in the redesign process. If you have any suggestions or ideas to offer, please e-mail them to us at Unit, Policy. As always, we welcome your suggestions and ideas.

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