

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,

Domestic Violence is an issue which many of us have become more aware of in recent years. While hardly a new issue, it is one about which the general public has become more educated and one in which its victims are more aware of services and options that may be available. It is also an area where I take pride in what we have accomplished and continue to accomplish as an agency. October was Domestic Violence Awareness month and I think, even a month late, that this provides an opportunity for us to take stock of what we have done in this very important area.

A cornerstone of our welfare reform efforts is the importance of self-sufficiency and of work. But if a woman is fearful for her safety, or that of her children, leaving home to go to work or school can be a terrifying proposition. Recognizing this, Massachusetts provides Domestic Violence waivers of the time limit, the work program and teen parent school attendance rules. When a waiver is granted there is an understanding that the individual receiving the waiver, the DV Specialist and the TAFDC worker must work together to help the DV victim take steps to provide safety for herself and her children and to move forward in achieving self-sufficiency while maintaining that safety. These steps may range from counseling, to seeking local part-time employment, to relocating to an area where it is unlikely the abuser will locate the family.

Helping the individual determine these steps and assisting her in achieving them is one of the duties of our Domestic Violence specialists. The DV specialists provide women who are DV victims with a

Continued on Page 3

From the Hotline

- Q. My client has failed to provide verification of the school her child is attending. What should I do?
- A. Only the dependent child subject to Learnfare for whom the required verification was not provided, should be closed. If the grantee submits a completed School Verification Notice (SV-1) or other verification of the school the child is attending within 30 days of the termination date, the dependent child must be re-opened. See 106 CMR 203.900
- Q. A woman is applying for assistance to help pay the burial expense for her deceased husband. How do I count her assets?
- A. The assets of a decedent and a financially responsible relative, such as a spouse, must be less than \$1,500.00 to qualify for funeral and burial expenses. Any assets available from the decedent or a financially responsible relative must be deducted from the maximum allowable cost (\$1,500.00). The Department then pays the balance, if any, up to \$1,100.00. See 106 CMR 705.700-705.710.
- Q. Do we exempt from the Food Stamp Work Program requirements a food stamp recipient with refugee status who attends a training program operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement?
- A. Refugees participating in recognized refugee training programs at least half-time are exempt from the Food Stamp Work Program requirements. Such participants are exempt as students enrolled half-time in a recognized training program. Refugee training programs, approved, funded or operated by the Office of Resettlement are recognized training programs. See 106 CMR 362.310(B)(8) and 362.320(B)(8).
- Q. A mother receives TAFDC for herself and two children. A third child receives SSI and child support. Is the child support countable when determining the mother's TAFDC grant?
- A. No. Any income of an SSI household member is noncountable. Therefore, the child support income received on behalf of the child receiving SSI is not countable for TAFDC eligibility. See 106 CMR 204.250.

- Q. Does a pregnant woman applying for EA have to verify that the expected child is due within 120 days of the date of application, just like a pregnant woman applying for TAFDC does?
- A. No. Unlike TAFDC, a pregnant woman applying for EA is eligible to apply any time during her pregnancy.

Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Checks

All State Letter 1212

The revised CORI regulations:

- replace the mandatory disqualification category of crimes with a lifetime presumptive disqualification category;
- allow further review of candidates with criminal records to be conducted by certain qualified mental health professionals;
- ensure that questions regarding prior convictions are consistent with the Massachusetts General Laws; and
- modify the list of crimes that fall under the disqualification categories.

Food Stamp Program - Eliminating Vehicles as Countable Assets

FS, SSFSP

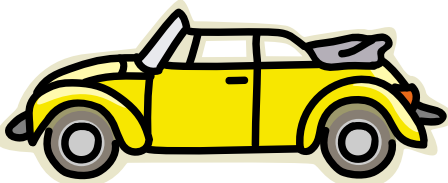
State Letter 1210

*A User's Guide: Transitional
Assistance Services and
BEACON Update 017*

As part of our effort to increase food stamp program participation and eliminate barriers to access, vehicles will no longer be considered as countable assets for food stamp purposes.

*A User's Guide: Transitional
Assistance Programs and BEA-
CON Update 017* implements the following changes in the Food Stamp Program on BEACON effective 10/29/01.

- BEACON will automatically adjust FS/SSFSP AUs with vehicle record values greater than zero to zero.
- The vehicle question on the Assets Q & A Navigator window will no longer be available to FS/SSFSP ONLY AUs.



Continued from Page 1

range of services. They are well versed in the community resources available in the area in which they work. They have relationships with the DSS Domestic Violence Unit, the court system, police forces and numerous social service agencies. They know about the availability of Domestic Violence shelters and they work together to ensure that the individuals they work with and their children are safe. Their work goes far beyond assisting DV victims with completing waiver requests, although that is certainly an important part of their job. They have a keen understanding of the importance of economic self-sufficiency if a DV victim is ever to truly move forward, and they work hard to help women figure out how to both move forward and stay safe.

The development of the Domestic Violence Unit and implementation of the DV waiver process are the cornerstones of our commitment to serving DV victims. Our external commitment is also demonstrated by our membership on the Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence and a number of other groups serving this population. This is an area where our cooperative work with other agencies and groups is critical. Helping someone move beyond being a DV victim is not simple and can rarely be accomplished through the efforts of one agency or individual. Rather, it requires coordination and cooperation and the ability to see beyond bureaucratic turf to achieve the goal of assisting a family. At DTA I believe we are succeeding in this area and that our efforts are viewed very positively among groups who work in the field of Domestic Violence.

As we all know, this is an area without simple solutions. It is an area which affects the victim, her family, her friends and her coworkers. Though we have made much progress, there is much we can still do—and will do. The most important thing anyone of us can do is to be sensitive to these issues. To really listen when an individual is talking. To refer someone to the DV specialist if there is an indication of violence. To work with the DV specialist to ensure that women know about their options and take advantage of them as they see fit. I know that I can count on your professionalism and sensitivity in this important area. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claire McIntire". The signature is written in a cursive style and is located below the word "Sincerely,".

Claire McIntire
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will examine two food stamp benefit errors: one related to voucher child care and one to child support payments paid directly to the recipient. Each was agency-caused, at least in part. Both were also preventable.

Child Care Deduction

A TAFDC recipient reapplied 6/1/01. She reported child care expenses for both Head Start and for a home daycare provider. The AU Manager followed up and verified the voucher for Head Start. She did not, however, take the next step – verifying the amount provided to the daycare provider, even though she was listed on the application.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

This was clearly an agency error. The recipient reported the correct information on the application. The AU Manager should have asked for verification of the amount paid to the daycare provider and treated it as an expense. Even if there is a voucher, the recipient may be paying either a co-pay amount or an amount for additional care. As a deduction from income, these expenses quickly result in an error. In this instance, the recipient was paying about \$4.50 per day for her two daughters in daycare as well as a small co-pay for Head Start. During the food stamp review month this resulted in an underpayment of \$84 for the QC month. It is important to verify all deductions from income.

Child Support Income

A recipient was receiving \$150 per week in child support directly from her former husband as verified by a court order from June 1995. She provided verification of support received on 2/10/01, 2/25/01, and 3/24/01. In May, however, the amount increased to \$200 per week. At the recertification the AU Manager verified the child care amount being paid out, but not the child support coming in.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

Even though the child support amount had not changed in six years, it is important to verify it at every recertification, especially in a quarterly reporting case such as this. (If a quarterly reporting case is done correctly at certification, failing to report changes will not cause an error.) In this case, the amount increased before the most recent recertification, which was not done correctly, thereby resulting in an error.

Reminder:

In July, LOQC staff did an extensive review of cases with state supplemental food stamps. One of the problems statewide is inconsistent treatment of these cases. By having LOQC review such cases we attempted to correct those problems. Recently, some errors have arisen when local office staff made changes to cases that were corrected by LOQC and the cases then reverted to receiving incorrect benefits. When changes in circumstances occur in these cases, we remind you to be especially careful when adjusting benefits. LOQC supervisors are available for questions about handling these cases.



From the Forms File

New Forms

The following form is used by AU Managers when victims of domestic violence request a waiver of TAFDC Program requirements. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2001-35 for more information.

02-830-1001-05

DVW-CHF (10/2001)

TAFDC Case History for Domestic Violence Waiver Request

The following form is now available in Spanish.

13-042-1001-05

NFL-ST (S) (Rev. 10/2001)

Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter

New Brochures

This brochure replaces the “What You Should Know About Transitional Services” brochure. Please refer to the FYI in this issue of *Transitions* for more information.

25-300-1101-05

FRSB (11/2001)

Family Resources Brochure

The following brochure is now available in Spanish.

02-822-1001-05

CC-1-Mail (S)(10/2001)

Getting and Keeping Child Care

Obsolete Form

The information from the “Domestic Violence History Form” has been incorporated into the new “TAFDC Case History for Domestic Violence Waiver Request” form.

02-565-1297-05

DV/HF

Domestic Violence History Form

Obsolete Brochure

Information from the “What You Should Know About Transitional Services” was included in the new “Family Resources Brochure.”

02-800-0899-05

02-801-0899-05 (S)

TBS (8/99)

What You Should Know About Transitional Services

FYI

Family Resources Brochure

AU Managers must provide all Food Stamp assistance units (PA or NPA) with a copy of the “Family Resources Brochure” at each application and/or reevaluation.

This brochure will replace the “What You Should Know About Transitional Services” brochure immediately in TAOs for TAFDC recipients. The new brochure explains many available resources and has a quick list of telephone numbers on the back page. The “What You Should Know About Transitional Services” brochure will continue to be mailed from Schrafft’s to recipients whose TAFDC cases closed two months previously until the printed supply is exhausted. At that time, Schrafft’s will begin mailing the “Family Resources Brochure” to closed TAFDC cases.

TAOs should not order any additional supplies of the “What You Should Know About Transitional Services” brochure. They should instead order the “Family Resources Brochure.” The Spanish version will soon be available.

Forms Which Continue to be Used with BEACON

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 015

The following changes were made to *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*

- Appendix A contains a list of existing forms which continue to be used with BEACON. The list, arranged by topics (for example, TAFDC Extensions, Domestic Violence, Disability, Fair Hearing, etc.), can be used as a reference source for AU Managers.
- Chapter I, Section B, BEACON Overview, now includes a reference to the new Appendix A.

Household Expenses and Vendor Payments

TAFDC

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 016

- *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 013* issued an incorrect page 45 for Section G. This update corrects the page.
- The Shelter Expenses section has been changed to Household Expenses.
- A "Deduct From" field was added to the Vendor Payments Window to specify the program (TAFDC or EAEDC) that the payment is to be deducted from.



November 2001

Expanded Categorical Eligibility for Food Stamp Benefits

FS, SSFSP

State Letter 1211

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Services and BEACON Update 017

As part of our effort to increase food stamp program participation and eliminate barriers to access, the categorical eligibility rules for food stamp benefits have been expanded.

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 017 implements the following changes in the Food Stamp Program effective 10/29/01.

- The categorical eligibility determination for FS AUs has been fully automated. AU Managers no longer have to go to the AU Composition Results window to identify FS AUs which are categorically eligible for food stamp benefits.
- The Categorically Eligible Reason dropdown box on the AU Composition Results window has been revised. It now includes two types of categorically eligible FS AUs:
 - EAEDC/SSI FS AU; and
 - TANF Services FS AU.

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FYI

Federal Veterans' Match Report

The Federal Veterans' Administration Match Report identifies assessed persons who may be receiving federal veterans' benefits and benefits from the Department of Transitional Assistance.

Local Office Quality Control (LOQC) staff is responsible for identifying assessed persons who may be receiving federal veterans' benefits and benefits from the Department of Transitional Assistance. AU Managers must act upon any and all information due to LOQC's findings related to this match.



FYI

TAFDC: New Five-Year (60-Month) Period

On 12/1/96, the Department instituted a five-year (60-month) period for all recipients. Nonexempt TAFDC recipients could receive up to 24 months of time-limited benefits within this 60-month period. As of 11/30/01, the five-year period is ending for some recipients.

Because the five-year period is a "rolling" five-year period, not all recipients subject to this rule are eligible for a new five-year period at the same point. Any recipient whose five-year period began 12/1/96 is eligible for a new five-year period effective 12/1/01. Any recipient whose five-year period began 1/1/97 begins a new five-year period effective 1/1/02 and so on.

Additionally, the new five-year period:

- resets the 24-month clock;
- resets the 60-day work search period (106 CMR 203.400(A)); and
- gives the recipient a new first-time claim of disability (a period of presumptive eligibility should he or she claim a disability) (106 CMR 203.530(F) and (G)).

Procedures on how the new 60-month period will be implemented are being finalized and will be sent to TAO Staff early in November.

TAFDC Case History for Domestic Violence Waiver Request (DVW-CHF) form

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 2001-35

This memo informs TAO staff about the new TAFDC Case History for Domestic Violence Waiver Request (DVW-CHF) form.

- The form replaces the *Domestic Violence History Form* (DV/HF) form.
- Discard the old forms when the new forms arrive and begin using the new ones immediately.

BEACON *Todays* Issued in October 2001

Starting this month, *Transitions* will include a list of the issues of BEACON *Today* published during the month. All issues of BEACON *Today* are available in Policy Online and starting in December the Policy Online listing will include the topics covered in each issue. Policy Online also has an index of BEACON *Today* topics and these are linked to the appropriate issue.

BT 47 (A) SSI Demo AUs Extended End Certification Dates (B) Indicating Appropriate Recertification Type (10/2/01)

BT 48 Food Stamp Recertification Notification (10/3/01)

BT 49 Follow-up to BEACON *Today* 48 (10/5/01)

BT 50 Conversion Benefit Discrepancies (10/5/01)

BT 51 Helpful Hints/Reminders When Working with BEACON (10/16/01)

BT 52 Monthly Reporting (10/16/01)

BT 53 (A) BEACON-Initiated Sanctions (B) AU Manager-Initiated Sanctions (10/16/01)

BT 54 BEACON-Generated SSNs Starting with "998" (10/17/01)

BT 55 Food Stamp Duplicate Issuances on Applications Authorized on Day 30 (10/18/01)

BT 56 Clocks Batch Program Data Fix (10/26/01)

BT 57 BEACON Increment 2.0.8 (10/26/01)

Happy Thanksgiving

from
the staff of

Policy, Procedure and Program Management

