

Transitions

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this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

It's been over one month since our Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) waiver expired. Still, our focus continues to be on helping parents find jobs and moving families out of poverty. Just as the closing of one door often prompts the opening of another, the end of this TANF waiver period also marks the beginning of a new chapter for DTA and our implementation of welfare reform. Whatever the outcome of the current discussions about welfare reform, our core mission – which includes promoting clients' independence and long-term self-sufficiency – will remain unchanged.

Our recent TANF High Performance bonus awards are an encouraging indicator for this post-waiver period. As many of you are aware, we received over \$3,000,000 from the federal government for improving the rate of unemployed TAFDC parents entering employment and over \$5,000,000 for helping parents keep their jobs. In addition, Massachusetts was granted over \$500,000 from the federal government for improvement in the Family Formation and Stability category.

How are we doing when compared to the rest of the country? In the job entry improvement category, we now rank third in the nation among the fifty states; for job retention improvement, we rank fourth in the nation; and for improving the overall success of our clients in the workforce (a combination of job retention and earnings gained), we are ranked sixth in the nation.

We can all be proud of the improvements we've made so far, but we still have a lot left to do. Even though Massachusetts was cited as

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having one of the most improved job-entry rates, we rank 48th in terms of the number of recipients who actually enter the workforce. This is a reflection of the fact that, under current state law, only about one-quarter of our TAFDC clients are required to work. That is why we are looking to design new programs, services and/or incentives aimed at engaging both the exempt population and those nonexempt clients who are not currently meeting their work program requirements. One of the ways we plan on doing this is by creating new job support and training programs that balance the needs of working parents with the demands of current market forces. Examples include the addition of ABE/ESOL classes in our skills training programs, using distance learning resources when available, and expanding services with community colleges.

By investing in the job prospects of all of our TAFDC families, we'll be improving the Massachusetts economy. By maintaining a job-first strategy for all of those who are job-ready, we'll be helping families stay strong. Your continued hard work in this direction is recognized and greatly appreciated.

At this time of year, my thoughts are also with our friends in the Gulf states as well as those on our own coast who have been hit hard by natural disasters or homelessness. As they work towards rebuilding their lives and their neighborhoods, remember that the COMECC Campaign begins this month. I'd like to invite you all to participate in the Campaign. It's an easy, convenient way to lend a helping hand.

Enjoy your Thanksgiving.

Sincerely,



From the Hotline

The questions and answers in this month's "From the Hotline" column concern verification requirements in the Food Stamp Program. Further information on this topic is available at 106 CMR 361.600 through 106 CMR 361.660 and 106 CMR 366.320.

- Q.** I received a completed, pre-filled USR form from one of my food stamp recipients. She has reported no changes since her last recertification. Given the fact that her household circumstances have remained the same, are there any verification requirements for this recipient?
- A.** No. In this situation, as long as the verification requirements were met at the last recertification and there is no questionable information reported, your recipient does not need to verify any additional information.
- Q.** Another one of my recipients completed her pre-filled USR form. On the form, she indicated that she now pays a higher rent but she did not provide verification of this change. How do I proceed?

A. Send a Verification Checklist (VC-1) to the recipient requesting verification of the new shelter amount. If the shelter amount remains unverified, it must be zeroed out since it was reported as part of the recertification process. The USDA has clarified that unverified expense amounts must be zeroed out if reported at initial application, reapplication or recertification.

Q. I zeroed out my recipient's expenses because he reported an unverified increase in his housing payment on his pre-filled USR form. He later contacted me and indicated that he is rarely able to get written verifications from his landlord. How should I proceed?

A. If you know that your recipient is having difficulty obtaining verifications, you should assist him in obtaining the required verifications and also consider using alternate forms of verification, such as collateral contacts with persons outside of the household. Refer to 106 CMR 361.640(B). For example, if you know that

your recipient's landlord is unlikely to write a rent receipt, you can either use a different source to verify the rent amount or obtain permission from your recipient using the Voluntary Authorization to Release Information form (available in Policy Online-Online Forms) to contact his landlord and verify the new rent amount.

Note: Collateral contact must be clearly documented on the BEACON Narratives Tab and in the AU record. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-49 for more information.

Q. Must I require a birth certificate to verify certain food stamp eligibility requirements?

A. No, not necessarily. Although the birth certificate *can* be used to verify certain eligibility requirements in the Food Stamp Program, there are other ways to verify these requirements. For example, when your recipient is unable to obtain a birth certificate and you need verification of identity, you use a driver's license or school ID. To verify the age of an elderly recipient, an approved collateral contact with a different social service agency is acceptable when the primary, documentary evidence is unavailable. Again, a note explaining these situations is required on the BEACON Narratives Tab.

Bay State CAP Outreach: Phase Two

FS

Field Operations Memo 2005-50

Field Operations Memo 2005-50A

Field Operations Memo 2005-50 provides information about the Phase Two Bay State CAP Outreach process. Phase Two will target approximately 28,500 SSI recipients who meet Bay State CAP eligibility criteria and are coded as "State Living Arrangement B" for SSI purposes. This target population includes individuals who live with others and share expenses. Also included in this group are licensed group home residents and homeless individuals living in shelters. Phase Two will also target about 4,500 SSI recipients coded as "State Living Arrangement A" who were screened out of Phase One.

Phase Two Outreach for individuals coded as “A” or “B” will be implemented through automatic enrollment. Phase Two Outreach to residents of licensed group homes will be implemented through a mailing with an Enrollment Form which must be completed for continued Bay State CAP eligibility.

Field Operations Memo 2005-50 also provides instructions for processing a regular FS application for a pending Bay State CAP AU.

Field Operations Memo 2005-50A transmits the Notice of Supplemental Benefits which must be used when approving benefits for a pending Bay State CAP Outreach AU that applies for regular FS in October or November 2005.

TAFDC – Changes to BEACON Employment Windows

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2005-51

Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.17, changes are being made to BEACON functionality. These changes are occurring on the Employment Status window and on the TAFDC tab of the Work Requirements window. Additionally, functionality is changing when ESP activities are terminated.

These changes are being made to ensure the Department has accurate recipient employment information.

TAFDC – Child Support Sanction Change

TAFDC

State Letter 1306

Field Operations Memo 2005-52

Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.17:

- a recipient who is sanctioned for noncooperation of child support would be removed from the grant. Additionally, the grant would be reduced by 25% of the grant he or she *would have received* prior to not cooperating.
- when the AU Manager enters the child support sanction *and authorizes the sanction on the Interview Wrap-up window*, EBC Results will **automatically** calculate the sanction and

send out a notice telling the recipient how the child support sanction affects the grant.

The sanction will remain in effect until the recipient cooperates with child support in accordance with 106 CMR 203.710. This change is being made to conform to Federal Welfare Reform regulations.

State Letter 1306 transmits this policy change effective November 1, 2005.

Bay State CAP Questions and Answers: Part Three

FS

Field Operations Memo 2005-53

Two previous Field Operations Memos provided information concerning issues that have developed since the implementation of Bay State CAP. Field Operations Memos 2005-18 and 2005-33 addressed conversation, ongoing process and outreach issues. This memo provides additional information about ongoing process implementation and outreach issues.

“The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good.” Samuel Johnson

FYI

Accepting Fax Documents for EA, EAEDC, FS and TAFDC Verifications

Verifications for EA, EAEDC, FS, and TAFDC may be hand delivered, mailed or accepted by fax. However, accepting faxed documents can present some issues.

Occasionally, there are documents that simply do not fax well and transmit in an unreadable fashion. In these cases, AU Managers may request the original documents either hand-delivered or mailed from the recipient.

Also, there may be times when documents received by fax seem questionable. Examples of questionable documents include:

- Documents that appear to be altered or tampered with, such as a birth certificate that seems to have information “whited-out” and typed over;
- A medical verification or doctor’s note that is not written on a doctor’s letterhead. In these situations, it’s appropriate to require an original document on a doctor’s letterhead.

For documents that contain an authorization to release medical

information, for example, the EAEDC Medical Report, an original document with the applicant or recipient’s signature must be obtained. A faxed copy maybe accepted as temporary verification as long as it is followed up with the original document.

Questionable documents should be reviewed with the supervisor to determine whether additional documentation is needed.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been updated.

The list reflects updates made to both the primary and secondary windows.

Alternate SSN

- Fields & Buttons
- Alternate SSN Identifiers (Pop up)
- Alternate SSN Tracking Tools (Pop up)
- Assign TAO Issued Numbers (“How To”)
- Change an Alternate SSN to a Valid SSN (“How To”)
- Disposition a Does Not Match with SSA Match (“How To”)
- Disposition an Unknown to SSA Match (“How To”)
- Enter an Alternate SSN (“How To”)
- Enter the Correct SSN (“How To”)
- Update an Alternate SSN (“How To”)
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

APID (Glossary term)

Assessed Person

- Warnings, Edits and Messages

AU Composition Results – Sanction Tab

Child Support Sanction

Clients With Facsimile/Dummy SSNs (View)

Clients With Sanctions (View)

EAEDC / SSI Timely Case Closing (Pop up)

Eligibility Explorer Narratives Tab

- Fields and Buttons

Eligibility Explorer Results Tab

- Complete a TAO Director Override for Proof of SSI Application or Appeal (“How To”)
- Display Eligibility Explorer Results Tab AU Information (“How To”)

How To

Name Clearance

- Conduct Name Clearance (“How To”)

Name Clearance Results

- Fields & Buttons

Riverside Rule (Pop up)

SSN Verification (View)

FYI

Changes to Policy Online and DTA Online

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

Policy Online

Field Operations Memos

In addition to the current numerical listing, the following options EA, EAEDC, Food Stamps, TAFDC, Cross-Program and Obsolete are displayed directly beneath the title *2005 Field Operations Memos*. When selected, the Field Operations Memos for the specific program type, those that are cross-program or those that are obsolete will be displayed.

Online Forms

The English and Spanish versions of the NFL – 18: *Notice to Recipients Requesting Financial Services* have been added to the list of Online Forms.

State Letters

At the request of TAO staff, the text of the 2005 State Letters is now available online.

DTA Online

Latest News/Photo Gallery

A link titled *Commissioner Wagner’s Testimony-USDA-2007 Farm Bill* has been added to the Latest News/Photo Gallery. When selected, the text of the Commissioner’s testimony is displayed.

The following memo has been added to the Latest News/ Photo Gallery: *Federal Awards for DTA*. Pictures taken at the ceremony are included.

DTA Online Home

A new option titled *2005 Field Operations Memos* has been added

to the DTA Online Home section. When selected, the list of Field Operations Memos issued in 2005 will be displayed. The text of the memos is available online. As Field Operations Memos are issued, they will be added to this list and will continue to be available from Policy Online.

FYI

Globe Santa Mailing

In October, active TAFDC, EAEDC, and Food Stamp recipients who reside in the Globe Santa geographical area received the “Boston Globe Santa – Holiday Gift Verification Notice.” Recipients may send this notice with their letter to Globe Santa requesting to participate in the Boston Globe Santa program. This verification notice lists the name, date of birth and gender of all children age 14 years or younger.

A second mailing will occur in the middle of November for new AUs that were approved after the first mailing.

Families who did not receive the notice will contact either the Central Office Income Verification Unit at 1-800-632-8095 or their AU Manager. This notice is available from the Letter Request window in BEACON.