

T Transitions

October 2003
Vol. XVIII No. 09



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

In July, I wrote to you about our successes in the area of food stamp outreach and increased participation. I was pleased to report that, through your efforts, we had dramatically increased our food stamp participation rate, and that we ranked second in the nation in increased food stamp participation. Since then, our performance has continued to improve, and between June 2002 and June 2003 our participation has increased by more than 24 percent. This is unbelievable!

And unbelievable successes deserve recognition and reward. On September 10, I was proud to attend a training and information session for all supervisors and a number of other staff in Sturbridge. The session, which we wanted to put together to honor the hard work of so many of you, was fully funded by USDA and provided an opportunity for a mix of training, information on USDA nutrition efforts, recognition, brainstorming and a presentation by our sister state, Connecticut.

Assistant Commissioner Cescia Derderian presented more than 30 certificates of recognition to staff from 18 TAOs and Central Office units. These certificates are a public acknowledgement of the unique efforts many individuals and offices have undertaken. It is clear that you have figured out that a cookie-cutter approach doesn't work; what succeeds in Pittsfield may not work in Lowell. You know your communities and your ideas are the ones that will work.

It was also interesting to hear the Connecticut presentation and to learn, in response to a question from the audience, that their caseloads are significantly higher than here in Massachusetts.

From the Hotline

This month's "From the Hotline" addresses issues associated with Field Operations Memo 2003-21 and State Letter 1261: "Work Program Requirement Expansion and Revised Extension Requirements-TAFDC."

Q. A woman came in to the office last week applying for TAFDC. She is a nonexempt grantee with three children. Her youngest child is four years old. After I explained the work program requirement to her, she mentioned that she would like to enroll in a degree program at a local university. It is my understanding that a four-year program is not a Department-approved educational or training activity, and that she would be unable to meet her 20-hour work program requirement in this program.

A. You are correct. Only an education - or training-related activity that is designed to prepare the applicant for a specific occupation or vocational proficiency upon the completion of the program is acceptable.

Two-year Associate Degree programs designed to prepare the applicant for a specific occupation upon completion of the program are also acceptable. Remind the applicant, however that, by choosing this activity, the work program requirement will be met for **only** 12 months out of the 24-month period. Following the first 12-month period, work or other acceptable activities totaling 20 hours per week must be performed in order to continue meeting the work program requirement.

Refer to 106 CMR 203.400 for more details.

Q. A TAFDC recipient has one son who is four years old. She wants to attend a non-degree training program at our local community college. She plans to enroll in five courses and will be in class a total of 15 hours per week. Can I approve this training program?

A. Yes. As long as the training activity is designed to prepare the applicant for a specific occupation or vocational proficiency upon the completion of the program, the activity is acceptable. Remember, however, that this recipient is also required to participate in work and/or community service for an additional five hours in order to fulfill her work program requirement.

Q. Are TAFDC AUs with categorically ineligible grantee noncitizens who have a child(ren) age two or older now required to meet the work program requirement?

A. Yes. Categorically ineligible grantee noncitizens who have a child(ren) age two or older and who are exempt from the reduced Need and Payment Standards because their noncitizen status prevents them from working in a paying job are now required to meet the work program requirement by participating in TEMP Community Service for 20 hours per week. Refer to 106 CMR 203.400(A)(3) for more information on their work program requirement.



"If you do not tell the truth about yourself, you cannot tell it about other people"

Virginia Woolf



Patterson v. Wagner Lawsuit

EA
Field Operations Memo
2003-29

A Superior Court Judge has issued a temporary restraining order mandating that the Department stop imposing the \$100 per night charge to an EA AU who loses a shelter termination appeal after requesting that the Department continue their assistance pending their appeal.

TAOs must:

- identify all EA AUs who received an EA shelter termination notice dated on or after September 4, 2003;
- send the identified AUs a special notice; and
- stop using the NFL-ST and NFL-9 notices revised effective 9/2003 and use the NFL-ST and NFL-9 revised 9/26/2003.



Continued from Page 1

Obviously, the imminent departure of many of our colleagues due to ERIP has me and others concerned about reviewing and streamlining activities to ensure that we continue to meet our core responsibilities. While there is no one answer, it was informative to know that another state conducts business with different caseload numbers than we currently have.

The day concluded with brainstorming sessions which produced a variety of ideas about how to continue moving forward. These ideas are being reviewed and categorized, and you will be receiving more information about them and on which ones the Department may be able to move forward. I also urge all of you to continue to submit ideas for streamlining our work processes. Please give your ideas to your director who will forward them to the appropriate Regional Director.

I want to thank those who participated in the day for their presence and interest on September 10. I thank them and all of you for the ongoing commitment to improving the Food Stamp Program in Massachusetts. Congratulations on the success of your efforts to date!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wagner".

John Wagner
Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Food Stamp Program: October 1, 2003 Cost-of-Living Increases

FS
State Letter 1263
Field Operations Memo 2003-26

State Letter 1263 and Field Operations Memo 2003-26 implement the annual cost-of-living changes in the Food Stamp Program.

Maximum Benefit Allotments- The maximum benefit allotments for all assistance unit sizes have increased.

Income Eligibility Standards- The Gross, Net, and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

Shelter Deduction- The Shelter Deduction has increased to \$378.

Standard Deduction – The Standard Deduction for AU sizes 1 through 4 remains the same but has increased for AU sizes 5 and greater.

Standard Utility Allowances- The heating standard utility allowance has increased to \$425. The nonheating standard utility allowance has increased to \$258. The telephone standard utility allowance has increased to \$30.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction- The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at \$143.

Employment Services Program Changes

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2003-24

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO Staff that:

- the Employment Services Program (ESP) has been funded for FY '04;
- ESP activities/components are available for applicant/recipient enrollment and participation; and
- the Structured Job Search and Young Parents Program have undergone participation changes.

Establishing Paternity

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2003-25
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 047

DTA and DOR are working together to collect the information needed to issue a court order for a genetic marker test (GMT) when paternity has not been established for the child. Genetic marker tests, also called paternity tests, use the DNA from the father, mother and child to determine the probability of paternity.

GMT is not required when the mother claims good cause for not cooperating with DOR, when paternity has been established, or when the child's father is deceased.

The mother is asked to sign the *Mother's Affidavit* for each child. She signs the document at application or during an eligibility review. Completed documents are forwarded to DOR.

BEACON Today Issued in September 2003

BT 105 BEACON Increment
2.1.4 (9/15/03)



FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

SDX Option Window

A new option entitled *Noncitizen Indicator Codes* has been added to the SDX window. When selected, the table listing the SDX noncitizen codes and a description of the codes will be displayed. These codes are valid entries in the "Alien" field displayed on the SDX Basic Inquiry screen. This table was previously documented as *Appendix F: SDX Alien (Noncitizen) Indicator Codes* in the *FMCS User's Guide*.

In addition, a link to the Policy Online *Noncitizen Online Guide* appears at the end of the Noncitizen Indicator Codes table. When selected, the Policy Online *Noncitizen Online Guide* will be displayed.

Policy Online



Universal Semiannual Reporting: Changes to Exceptions

FS

State Letter 1262

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance and BEACON Update 046

State Letter 1262 transmits changes to the Food Stamp Program's Universal Semiannual Reporting exceptions. Specifically:

- 1) NPA FS AUs with a recipient receiving rental income, and
- 2) NPA FS AUs who are homeless

are now required to be on Universal Semiannual Reporting.

The *User's Guide* update transmits the following changes to Chapter IV:

Section A makes changes to the application window. Specifically, selecting a food stamp-specific Method of Application will generate a notice confirming that the application has been received. Section A also documents changes to the Method of Application and the Source of Application (previously known as "Who Made the Application"). Section A also makes changes to the section on the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Section B makes technical corrections to the REVS process.

Section C makes changes to the Universal Semiannual Reporting exemptions. Specifically, Homeless AUs and AUs with Rental Income are no longer exempt from the Universal Semiannual Reporting process.

Systems User's Guide Update 155

All

Volume 2: FMCS User's Guide

Appendix F: SDX Alien (Noncitizen) Indicator Codes is obsolete because the information contained in Appendix F can now be accessed from Policy Online. For more information, please refer to the FYI above entitled *Changes to Policy Online*.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

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

Added:

Add a New Assisting Person
Add New Assistance Program Information
Change Text Parameters
Complete the Request
Delete Assistance Program Information
Enter Information on an Assessed Person
Modify Existing Assisting Person Information
Modify Existing Assistance Program Information
Process Asset Information
Process AU Mandatory/Responsible Information
Process Address List Information
Process Boarders Information
Process Disqualification Information
Process Document Information
Process ESP Dependent Care Information
Process Foster Care Information
Process Income & Expenses Information
Process Nonfinancial Information
Process Organization Search Information
Process Personal Relationships
Process Pregnancy Information
Process Program Component List Information
Process Resource Search Information
Process Temporary Absence
Restart Assisting Person Information
Terminate Assisting Person Information

Revised:

Add, Modify or Remove Household Member Information
Add or Update a Resource
Address List
Assessed Person
Assisting Person

Assets
AU Mandatory/Responsible
Boarders
Complete Request
Disqualification
Document Text Parameters
Domestic Violence
ESP Dependent Care
Foster Care
Household
Income & Expenses
Maintain Document
Modify Existing Domestic
Violence Information
Nonfinancials
Organization Search
Personal Relationships
Pregnancy
Process New Domestic
Violence Information
Program
Program Component List
Information
Resource Search
Temporary Absence

BEACON Help



***Farm Bill of 2002:
Restoration of Noncitizen
Children Under 18 Years
Old***

FS
State Letter 1264
Field Operations Memo
2003-27

Effective October 1, 2003, the Farm Bill restores food stamp eligibility to noncitizen children under 18 years old, residing in the US in a qualified status, regardless of their date of entry into the United States.

Field Operations Memo 2003-27 outlines:

- procedures for processing re/applications containing a noncitizen child(ren) eligible for food stamp benefits as of October 1, 2003 and other currently eligible AU members;
- procedures for adding a child(ren) eligible as of October 1, 2003 to an existing FS AU;
- procedures for calculating and issuing retroactive food stamp benefits, if any;
- AU Manager activity for the report listing active AUs; and
- the elimination of Noncitizen Sponsorship Deeming for children, effective October 1, 2003.

ADA Update for EA and SSI

EA
EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits and BEACON - Update No. 015

Information on accommodations based on ADA has been updated in *EA and SSI Special Services*. Detailed instructions may be found in Field Operations Memo 2003-19.

Appendix A has been revised with the updated EA reasons for the AU Composition Results window.

Baynes v. Wagner Lawsuit

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2003-23

Field Operations Memo 2003-23 explains that:

- A Superior Court Judge has recently issued a decision in favor of a TAFDC parent seeking an exemption of the work requirement as a caretaker of a disabled child. In this case, the child attends school full-time, and the medical provider did not certify on the TAFDC-4 that the parent had to be home during normal school hours to care for the child.
- The Judge held that the state's Welfare Reform Act and the Department's own definition of the disabled child caretaker exemption at 106 CMR 203.100 (A)(1)(b)(1) require only that the parent show he or she is essential to the care of the child.
- The TAO director or designee must contact the Legal Division by e-mail at Ruth_Greenholz@dta.state.ma.us with the name, SSN and a brief description of the basis for the exemption of a parent seeking the exemption or a parent whose request has been denied after May 16, 2003.



From the Forms File

New Forms

*DOR Establishment of Paternity: Information for Mothers
(DTA Pat Info 08/05/03)*

DOR Mother's Affidavit (DTA Mother's Aff 08/05/03)

*DOR Mother's Affidavit Referral Form
(DTA Mo Aff Referral Form 08/05/03)*

The above forms are supplied to the Department by DOR and are used to establish paternity and a child support order. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2003-25 for more information on the use of these forms. An initial supply of these forms will be sent to local TAOs, and TAOs can order additional supplies from Schraffts through the normal process.

Revised Forms

AU Managers should discard the old version of any form and use the new form.

*25-150-0903-05
TABA-1 (Rev. 9/2003)
Application for Transitional Assistance Benefits*

*09-150-0903-05
SSI/FSP-1 (Rev. 9/2003)
SSI Food Stamp Benefits Reapplication Form*

*25-170-0903-05
25-171-0903-05 (S)
FSA-1 (Rev. 9/2003)
Food Stamp Benefits Application*

*09-181-0903-05
09-182-0903-05 (S)
FSP-RCF (Rev. 9/2003)
Food Stamp Benefits Recertification for Universal Semiannual Reporting Households*

On the signature page the release of information paragraph to utility provider and the nondiscrimination section (see just above the recipient signature section) are revised on the above program applications.

*09-375-1003-05
FS-USR-2 (Rev. 10/2003)
Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form*

The Income Guidelines are revised on this form. Instructions for AU Manager and recipient use of this form have been added on the reverse side of the form. The Spanish version will be available soon.

Revised Brochures

*09-070-1003-05
FSP-INFO (Rev. 10/2003)
How to Get Food Stamp Benefits*

The FSP-INFO brochure is updated with the new cost-of-living income limits for food stamp benefits. The Spanish version will be available soon.

*02-210-0903-05
02-213-0903-05 (S)
Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children*

Language regarding the work program requirements is revised in this brochure as a result of legislative changes for FY04.

TAFDC Work Program Requirement Expansion and Revised Extension Requirements

TAFDC
State Letter 1261
Field Operations Memo
2003-21

State Letter 1261 and Field Operations Memo 2003-21 transmit expansions to the TAFDC work program requirement and revised extension requirements. Specifically, nonexempt grantees whose youngest child is between the ages of two and mandatory full-time school age:

- 1) are now required to meet the work program requirement unless they meet a reason found in 106 CMR 203.400(A)(1).
- 2) may meet the work program requirement through Department-approved education or training activities or through employment or community service.
- 3) if in the final three months of time-limited benefits and currently enrolled and participating in a Department-approved education or training activity, may be granted a three-month extension to complete the activity. A second three-month extension may be granted to complete the activity, if necessary.

FYI

Unavailability of COMETS

DOR's computer system, COMETS, will be temporarily brought down. At the close of business on September 30, 2003, DOR needs to bring the system down to make some improvements to the financial tracking system. It is anticipated that COMETS will be unavailable from October 1, 2003 until October 6, 2003. This means:

- child support checks will be delayed;
- the staff that answer the "1-800" number will not have access to information on a DOR case;
- the telephone voice response system will not have updated information (the information as of September 30, 2003 will be available); and
- the interactive case manager at www.mass.gov/dor will not have updated information (the information as of September 30, 2003 will be available).

DOR has sent a notice to every custodial parent in their caseload telling them about the system being brought down, what it means to the custodial parent and where to call if there are any questions.

Pregnant Women Eligibility for EA

EA
Field Operations Memo 2003-28

There have been a number of issues called in to the Policy Hotline regarding clarification of a pregnant woman's eligibility for EA. Field Operations Memo 2003-28 reinforces some of the eligibility factors about the EA Program.



To Our

Retirees

You will be missed!