

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

This month, I have had the pleasure of meeting and hearing from more of you, and as always, I continue to be impressed and heartened by your hard work and commitment. I was particularly honored to host a breakfast for nominees and winners of the Pride and Performance awards, and to attend the fabulous luncheon that was held at the Sheraton Boston earlier this month. The event honored many of our colleagues from Central and the field for their creativity, teamwork and dedication to the Department's mission. It was truly inspiring to learn more about the many instances in which our staff has gone above and beyond the call of duty to assist people in need. I was, and am, proud to work with so many talented individuals, and to be part of such a terrific organization.

I am equally proud of the high quality work you all do every day in order to meet the three main goals of the Department: assisting our clients to increase their levels of economic self-sufficiency; reducing homelessness; and continually improving service delivery. While we may not be able to control factors that contribute to poverty and homelessness, we are laying the groundwork for real change-in programs and in peoples' lives. I cannot thank you enough for your patience, flexibility and dedication during a time of increasing need. Your efforts are noticed, not only by me, but by many others, including Governor Patrick, who visited the Springfield-Liberty Street TAO this month (more below) and EOHHS Secretary JudyAnn Bigby, who visited the Dudley Square TAO and was particularly interested to learn about our efforts to address rising homelessness.

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The ability to transform our mission into workable solutions is apparent in local offices across the Commonwealth. One particular initiative that has focused on the goal of increasing economic self-sufficiency is the DTA orientation sessions for TAFDC clients. The roots of this initiative began in the field and were formalized when supervisors (and Pride in Performance winners!) in the Springfield-State TAO developed the approach and began offering the service to their clients. Over the past months, a team of field and Central Office staff worked collaboratively to conduct the orientation sessions statewide. These sessions allow us to formally introduce ourselves to our clients and to make them aware of the opportunities available for increasing their economic self-sufficiency. This is just one example of how your good ideas are translated into effective service delivery.

More good news arrived last month when the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded Massachusetts with two Food Stamp Program (FSP) High Performance Bonuses totaling \$3M for its exceptional administration of the Food Stamp Program, including our outstanding work in the timely processing of food stamp applications and having one of the most improved Program Access Indexes (PAI) for FY 2006. Once again, I would like to thank those of you who helped make these awards possible. In capturing both of these bonuses, Massachusetts is continuing our commitment to ensuring that all individuals and families eligible for the Food Stamp Program are enrolled and provided nutritional assistance as quickly as possible. This is the fourth consecutive year that DTA has received the bonus award for timely application processing and we have continuously improved our PAI, placing fourth among the fifty states for the most improved PAI. All of the hard work has also been recognized by the Governor who was only able to visit one TAO, but clearly expressed his thanks and appreciation to all of you. He made specific mention of the incredible progress in the Food Stamp Program, which will allow us to fund innovative programs that are aligned with our overall anti-poverty approach, including initiatives to increase economic self-sufficiency, reduce homelessness and further increase access to programs and services.

Yet, while the orientation sessions and the bonus awards are both satisfying developments, they are just the beginning. The DTA

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors, one related to child support and the other related to the late submission of verifications.

Child Support

This PA FS case consisted of a mother and two children. The mother and one child received TAFDC; the other child was a Family Cap child. Prior to the QC review, the FS case was recertified for eight months. At the time of the recertification, the client reported that she received RSDI and SSI income. She did not report any other unearned income. During the QC review, the DOR-Child Support screen showed that she was also receiving child support for an older son (22 years old) who was no longer living in the home. This child support was being paid because an arrearage accumulated before her son turned 18. The client had been receiving this child support income for over a year. She further explained that she kept the money and did not turn any part of it over to her adult son. This unreported income caused a significant overpayment error.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

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Although the client failed to report the child support income, the AU Manager might have been able to prevent the error by checking the DOR screen at the time of the last recertification to see if child support payments were being made to the client. Child support payments are frequently sent to TAFDC parents with Family Cap children, SSI children and often for children no longer in the home either because of age or DSS placement. If there is a payment issued for a child no longer in the home, it is countable to the household's income unless the mother verified that she gave this income to the third party to whom it belonged, in this instance, her 22-year-old son.

Verifications Received After 30 Days

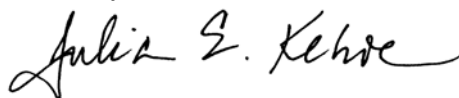
This NPA household applied for food stamp benefits on April 5. Expedited benefits

orientation session represents only one example of a local, "home-grown" approach to improving customer service and client access, but the pattern for developing this initiative is far from unique. Likewise, while our Food Stamp Program access index improved by 6.31 percentage points in FY 2006, I look forward to achieving an even higher score in the next fiscal year.

Before closing, I'd like to also mention that October is Domestic Violence Awareness month. The problems resulting from domestic violence continue to plague certain residents of our cities and towns, and it is critical for us to connect our clients with the resources available at our TAOs to identify and minimize the impact of these problems. Each TAO is assigned a domestic violence specialist. If you are new to the Department and have not yet had an opportunity to meet the specialist assigned to your office, I urge you to make a point of doing so. In the event that you are helping a family that is experiencing domestic violence, working collaboratively with your domestic violence specialist will contribute towards a safe outcome for the family.

Together, we are reframing the entryway to our Department's benefits and services. Please join me as we continue along this path, and thank you for your help and support.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

09-375-1007-05

09-376-1007-05 (S)

FS-USR-2 (Rev. 10/2007)

Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

The Categorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Standards have been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standards changed due to the Food Stamp Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA).

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09-502-1007-05

FS-ACSE (Rev. 10/2007)

Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licensed Group Home Residents

The Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licensed Group Home Residents (FS-ACSE) form, which is completed by group home providers, has been revised. The maximum coupon allotment figure of \$152.00 has been removed from the "For Department Use Only" section. This was done so it will not be necessary to revise the form when the yearly food stamp cost-of-living adjustment is made. When calculating the tenant shelter expense, AU Managers are responsible for entering the current maximum coupon allotment for a household of one.

02-557-1007-05

DVWR-CL (Rev. 10/2007)

Check List for a Domestic Violence Waiver Request

The check box that requires the additional completion of the Family Cap Exception/Waiver Request form to be included in the Domestic Violence Waiver Request package if a waiver of the Family Cap rule due to domestic violence is requested has been deleted from the Check List for a Domestic Violence Waiver Request form.

02-201-1107-05

02-260-1107-05 (S)

T-A34/36 (Rev. 11/2007)

Assignment of Support Cooperation with Child Support Enforcement Division of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) Good Cause Claim

The T-A34/36 form has been revised to make it clear that all applicants and recipients of the TAFDC program must assign rights to support and cooperate in establishing paternity, regardless of the source of the funding for the program. Use this version of the T-A34/36 and discard all other versions.

Revised Brochure

09-070-1007-05

09-079-1007-05 (S)

FSP-INFO (Rev. 10/2007)

How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

The Income Standard for households without children under 19 or without elderly or disabled household members has been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard due to the Food Stamp COLA.

From the Hotline

The questions below pertain to Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Act (LIHEAA) payments, the new H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program Initiative and the Standard Utility Allowance. For more information on the Standard Utility Allowance (SUA), refer to 106 CMR 364.400(G). For more information on the new H-EAT Initiative, please refer to Field Operations Memo 2007-31 and Field Operations Memo 2007-31A.

Q. Food Stamp Program rules allow households receiving or anticipating receipt of LIHEAA payments to have their benefits calculated using the heating/cooling SUA. These traditional LIHEAA fuel assistance payments are approved for clients who pay for heat or for certain clients who have shelter

expenses that are disproportionate to their income.

If a LIHEAA client moves or is no longer incurring a cost to heat his or her home, do we indicate these changes on BEACON?

A. Yes.

There are no changes in Food Stamp Program procedures for clients in receipt of LIHEAA. Therefore, a food stamp client receiving LIHEAA payments who verifies an address change should be asked about his or her utility obligations. Any appropriate changes should be made on BEACON. These changes could occur at recertification or as a part of a case maintenance activity.

- If a food stamp client in receipt of LIHEAA payments reports a change of address and a continuation of heating/cooling charges, then make no changes to the heating/cooling SUA and update BEACON with the new address.
- If a food stamp client in receipt of LIHEAA payments reports a change of address and states that he

or she is no longer paying for any heating/cooling charges, then update BEACON with the new address and new utility expense information.

NOTE: Active food stamp clients who no longer incur heating/cooling expenses will be selected for the H-EAT Program in the future, as long as they are not in receipt of Bay State CAP and are not homeless.

Q. If a change of address is reported by a client in the H-EAT Program, how do I proceed?

A. The H-EAT Program operates differently from the traditional LIHEAA Program. Food stamp clients in the H-EAT Program are entitled to the heating/cooling SUA for an entire year, *even if the household reports a change in address or a change in utility obligations*. While the client's address change should be recorded on BEACON, no changes should be made to the H-EAT client's SUA.

TAFDC: DTA Orientation Sessions

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2007-45

Beginning April 2007, the Department implemented Orientation Sessions in TAOs statewide. DTA Orientation Sessions uniformly communicate to TAFDC applicants and clients information about DTA programs and support services, especially ESP opportunities available to them. Each TAO has a PowerPoint presentation, located in the "W" Drive, in the folder entitled "Orientation."

This memo:

- promotes the use of the PowerPoint presentation as a tool for DTA Orientation Sessions; and
- details a standardized format for conducting DTA Orientation Sessions.



Prevention Services through the Housing Assistance Program

EA

Field Operations Memo 2007-46

HAP will no longer provide EA prevention services to EA-eligible families who are at risk of losing their current housing. Families needing prevention services must now be referred to Regional Housing Consumer Education Center (HCEC) agencies.

HAPs will now focus on rapidly placing homeless families in sustainable housing, providing 12 months of stabilization services, and developing housing resources.

TAFDC: Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Agreement Client Survey

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2007-47

Field Operations Memo 2007-47A

As part of the OCR agreement (see Field Operations Memos 2005-58 and 2007-1), DTA is required to conduct a survey of clients who participated in an ESP activity. The purpose of the survey is to ensure that clients' education, training and job preparation needs were met and that these needs were met on a timely basis. This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about the survey.

Field Operations Memo 2007-47A informed TAO staff about a change in the formatting of the letter and survey.

TAFDC: Automated Mailing of TAFDC Caring for the Disabled Cases

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2007-48

Field Operations Memo 2007-36 introduced the automated Caring for the Disabled reverification process. The purpose of Field Operations Memo 2007-48 is to highlight the following:

- Beginning the week of October 1, 2007, BEACON sent out notices and a revised Verification of Caring for the Disabled (TAFDC-4) form to re-verify the exemption;

- An additional appointment letter must be sent to the client if he or she does not keep the first scheduled appointment; and
- The period for a client to verify the disabled person's status has been extended from six months to twelve months.

The ESP Online Guide

TAFDC and FS

Field Operations Memo 2007-49

Effective September 24, 2007, the ESP Online Reference Guide is available to TAO staff. TAO staff will be able to use the ESP Online Reference Guide to find current providers servicing their TAO and specific ESP activities offered. Having this information readily available will help TAO staff make appropriate referrals to ESP providers.

Food Stamp Program: Change to Notices for Categorically Eligible Households with Zero Benefit Amount

FS

Field Operations Memo 2007-50

This memo informs TAO staff that special notices have been developed for categorically

eligible food stamp clients whose benefit amount is zero. These notices (approval, re-opening, recertification, and change) explain that, although the client is not currently eligible to receive benefits, he or she may be eligible for benefits if circumstances change, and encourage the client to report changes that may positively affect the benefit amount.

Food Stamp Program Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)

State Letter 1329
Field Operations Memo
2007-51

State Letter 1329 and Field Operations Memo 2007-51 implement the annual cost-of-living changes in the Food Stamp Program.

Maximum Food Stamp Benefit

The maximum food stamp benefit levels for all assistance unit sizes have increased.

Income Eligibility Standards

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



Shelter Deduction

The Maximum Shelter Deduction (for assistance units not containing an elderly or disabled member) has increased to \$431.

Standard Utility Allowance

The Heating Standard Utility Allowance has increased to \$534. The Nonheating Standard Utility Allowance has increased to \$334. The Telephone Standard Utility Allowance has increased to \$39.

Note: The Bay State CAP SUA will remain at \$297.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction

The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains \$143.

Standard Deduction

The Standard Deduction amounts for assistance unit sizes 4 and greater have increased.

Eligibility of Cuban/Haitian Entrants for TAFDC and Food Stamps

TAFDC, FS
Field Operations Memo 2007-52

The purpose of Field Operations Memo 2007-52 is to clarify the process for determining if a noncitizen is eligible for public assistance as a Cuban/Haitian entrant. The memo describes the qualifications for Cuban/Haitian entrant status, and provides examples of the documentation needed to verify this status.

EAEDC: Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) Increase

EAEDC
Field Operations Memo 2007-53

Effective July 1, 2007, the Legislature increased the Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) for those EAEDC clients in Living Arrangement C and E (see 106 CMR 321.410) from \$60.00 to \$72.80 monthly. This increase is reflected in their October benefits.

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about:

- the automated update of clients' benefits with the new PNA amount by BEACON; and
- the calculation performed by BEACON for active clients, retroactive to July 1, 2007 or the benefit effective date, if after July 1, 2007.

FYI

BEACON Online Help Update Issued in September 2007

BEACON Online Help Update Issue # 13 (09/21/07)

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

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

Diversity-Events

The Diversity Event for October is entitled *National Disability Employment Awareness Month*. Selecting the Events option displays a summary on *National Disability Employment Awareness Month*.

Diversity-Newsletter

The *Perspectives* Newsletter dated September 17, 2007 has been added to the list of available options.

Latest News/Photo Gallery

The Latest News/Photo Gallery includes the following links:

- *DTA Launches Pilot Program To Improve Food Stamp Access and Customer Service*;
- *Memo From Commissioner Kehoe: Food Stamp Bonuses and the Governor's Visit to Springfield-Liberty St. TAO*; and
- a press release entitled: *Massachusetts Awarded More Than \$3 Million in Food Stamp Program Bonuses*.

Resource Inventories - ESP

Selecting the ESP link from Resources Inventories displays the following program options:

- Job Search/Job Readiness;
- Subsidized Employment;
- Vocational Education and Training Programs;
- Community Service Programs;
- Support Programs; and
- Food Stamp E&T

When selected, each program option provides a list of activities offered by current providers/resources and a link to the policy reference associated with each activity.

Refer to Field Operations Memo 2007-49: *The ESP Online Reference Guide* for additional information.



“Life is not so short but there is always time enough for courtesy.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

FYI

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Home Page

This month you will see the following changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA home page.

Research and Statistics

The link to DTA Facts and Figures displays updates to the following information:

- Caseload Information;
- Grant Levels and Eligibility Standards;
- FY'08 Appropriations;
- DTA Revenue by Source; and
- Food Stamp Error Rate.

The program links of Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children; Food Stamps; Homeless; Supplemental Security Income; and Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children, when selected, display updated caseload information.



FYI

Expired Documents

Occasionally a noncitizen will present expired documents as verification of noncitizen status. An expired document, however, does not necessarily mean that the person's immigration status has expired.

Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) cards are usually valid for 10 years from the date of issue. The expiration date indicates when the card expires and must be renewed. An expired card does **not** mean that the individual's lawful permanent resident status has expired. Unless you have information from the noncitizen or SAVE that the person's LPR status has been revoked by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), assume that the noncitizen continues to be an LPR. You do not need to request additional verification or require the person to renew the card.

Additionally, an expired Employment Authorization Document (EAD) or any other expired document does not necessarily mean that the person's underlying immigration status has expired. If someone presents only an expired EAD or any expired document (and a SAVE check does not indicate current status), submit a secondary document request to SAVE or request other documents from the noncitizen. If the noncitizen has verified that he or she has applied for renewal of the document or adjustment of status, you should assume continuation of the person's current status.



FYI

New MAOA Process

Currently, when Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) benefits are terminated by DTA, clients are automatically converted to MassHealth through the Massachusetts Association of Older Americans (MAOA) process. This conversion takes place regardless of the TAFDC closing reason. The MAOA case is selected for review by MassHealth after a four-month period.

Effective October 1, 2007, TAFDC clients will no longer automatically convert to a MAOA case when cash benefits are terminated with the following action reasons:

- closed due to receipt of SSI,
- voluntary withdrawal,
- no longer a resident of Massachusetts,
- closed due to death,
- whereabouts unknown-no mail returned, and
- whereabouts unknown-mail returned.

Instead, these clients will be matched to the MA 21 file to determine if they are currently on a MassHealth Standard benefit that is equivalent to MAOA.

- If there is a MassHealth Standard benefit equivalent to MAOA, the client will not be included in the MAOA process.
- If there is not a MassHealth Standard benefit equivalent to MAOA, the client will be converted to a MAOA case automatically.

No AU Manager action is needed for this new MAOA process to occur.



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Quality Corner (con't)

were issued to the family on April 11. The expedited benefits were certified from the date of application through May 3. By the 30th day, the applicant had not yet provided certain mandatory verifications, and was denied on May 7. (Day 30 was a Saturday.)

On May 21, the client provided the outstanding mandatory verifications. The case was reopened effective May 8, the day after the AU Manager denied the case. QC determined that the case should have been reopened effective May 4, the day after the expedited issuance ended. This caused an underissuance in benefits to the client.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

According to Field Operations Memo 2006-20, once the client provides at least one mandatory verification (including the overnight validation of the client's Social Security number by SVES), the client is allowed a second 30-day period in which to provide additional mandatory verifications. In this case, the remaining mandatory verifications were submitted between Day 31 and Day 60,

so the client was eligible for benefits back to the effective date of the closing. The client was entitled to a full month of benefits in May. If the case was reopened effective May 4, this would have prevented the underissuance error.

