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Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Consolidated Report

March 2019



**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE
TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN
CONSOLIDATED REPORT
MARCH 2019**

OVERVIEW

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is pleased to submit this comprehensive report on the status of the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program, as required by sections 2(B) and 5 of Chapter 18 and section 3C(d) of Chapter 118 of the Massachusetts General Laws.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports.

DTA serves one out of every eight people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.

TAFDC PROGRAM OVERVIEW

TAFDC is a state and federally-funded program that provides cash assistance and employment supports to families with children, and pregnant women, with little or no income or assets. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

The goal of TAFDC is to support families as they transition from economic crisis to stability. Over the past three years DTA has worked to remove barriers to economic mobility and to help families find their own best path to success. The Department has pursued a three-pronged approach:

1. expanding employment resources for families to access
2. exploring new approaches to conducting DTA business and interactions with families
3. revising policies that get in the way of families achieving their goals

In FY19, DTA implemented important updates to TAFDC policies. These included doubling the TAFDC asset limit from \$2,500 to \$5,000, eliminating the bifurcated grant structure for exempt and non-exempt households, and disregarding 100% of a family's earned income, up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, for six months. These three policy changes better position working parents for life after TAFDC by allowing them to gain work experience, take promotions and save money before transitioning off TAFDC. Much of these changes also constituted a simplification of TAFDC program rules, ensuring that families are able to understand their options, and better plan for life after TAFDC.

In addition, DTA has developed a strong partnership with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) to engage parents with a disability who historically have trouble accessing effective employment supports. The Department also re-procured the Young Parents Program (YPP), an educational program for parents ages 14-24. Through this procurement DTA updated YPP goals in recognition that young parents need more than just a high school credential to adequately support their family. YPP has been expanded to include eligibility for non-custodial parents of children on TAFDC in recognition that the health, wellbeing, and economic stability of both parents is important for a child’s healthy development.

DTA continues to work on further simplifying program rules and providing families with access to the resources they need in order to transition off TAFDC permanently. Governor Baker’s FY20 budget proposal includes several additional reforms to the TAFDC program that will continue to build on the momentum to date.

CASELOAD INFORMATION

As of February 19, 2019, the total TAFDC caseload was 29,191. Of these, 7,753 cases have adults who are required to be working or participating in a work-related activity such as education, training or work readiness coaching. On average, DTA clients remain on TAFDC for 35 months.

Prior to this fiscal year, grant amounts have not been adjusted since 2000. Effective July 1, 2018, DTA eliminated the bifurcated grant structure that had been in place since November of 1995. All exempt and non-exempt clients now receive the same grant payment. This was accomplished by raising the non-exempt’s grants by 2.75%. This elimination simplified the program, thus allowing families to more easily navigate the benefits system and more easily focus on making the right long-term decision for their family. The current grant structure is depicted in **Table 1**.

TABLE I TAFDC PAYMENT STANDARD MATRIX		
Household size	Public or subsidized housing	Private housing
1	\$388	\$428
2	\$491	\$531
3	\$593	\$633
4	\$691	\$731
5	\$792	\$832
6	\$896	\$936
7	\$997	\$1,037
8	\$1,097	\$1,137
9	\$1,197	\$1,237
10	\$1,298	\$1,338
Each additional household member	+\$105	+\$105

WORK PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

TAFDC participants are required to participate in work-related activities as a condition of eligibility, with some exceptions. The Employment Services Program (ESP) is a state-funded program, eligible for TANF reimbursement, whose primary goal is to provide a way to economic mobility for TAFDC families through work. Through ESP, DTA case managers assist clients to meet their work program requirements primarily by referring them to appropriate activities for their skill level and goals, often through community-based training providers or MassHire Career Centers. ESP providers then assist TAFDC clients in resolving barriers to employment and finding jobs. In FY18, DTA was able to fund ESP slots to help approximately 3,900 clients.

Participants in work-related activities, including paid employment, are eligible to receive child care and transportation supports. To comply with new federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) regulations, this year DTA, in collaboration with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), made substantial changes to the child care referral process to better meet the needs of TAFDC families. Most significantly, parents that are enrolled in an approved employment activity are able to keep their child care for a full year before needing to reauthorize, thus supporting stable employment for parents and stable care for children.

PARTNERSHIP IN WIOA/LEARN TO EARN

DTA is an essential partner in the state's efforts to implement the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA seeks to integrate states' workforce systems to better serve employers and jobseekers. WIOA reauthorized the nation's employment, training, adult education and vocational rehabilitation programs for the first time in 16 years. The Act's emphasis is on targeting low-income adults and youth with limited training and skills as well as individuals with disabilities to help them overcome barriers to economic success.

Since the passage of WIOA, DTA has worked closely with the Executive Office for Labor and Workforce Development (EOWLD) to implement a new, more integrated system of workforce development for DTA clients and others with significant barriers to work. The aim of this collaboration is to:

- develop meaningful pathways to work and economic self-sufficiency for low-income, disabled and chronically un/underemployed individuals/families; and
- ensure that DTA individuals and families with significant barriers can access the workforce system with the support needed to attain and sustain employment.

This partnership has allowed DTA to provide additional employment support options to TAFDC families over and beyond the currently funded programs.

The FY2018 and FY2019 budgets included a new initiative proposed by Governor Baker, Learn to Earn (LTE), which aims to train and place unemployed and underemployed individuals and parents in jobs in high-demand fields through partnerships between public agencies, businesses, community-based organizations, and career centers.

A primary goal of LTE is to work with community based partnerships to develop and test models to serve public benefit recipients to help them set and achieve goals necessary for sustained economic stability, such as maintaining and growing family net resources and minimizing the real or perceived potential impact of increased earned income on benefit receipt. The initiative will identify strategies to better coordinate across public benefit programs and reduce benefit cliff effects for participants.

The initiative is being overseen and guided by an Interagency Workgroup including the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), the Executive Office of Education (EOE), the Department of Early Education and Care, the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED), the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA).

The LTE Interagency Workgroup functions to solve problems across systems, identifying internal policy, regulatory and procedural reforms at the state level to better incentivize work for clients across systems and to promote a two-generational approach to disrupting the multi-generation cycle of poverty.

PATHWAYS TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

DTA believes that all clients should be assisted in moving to a better economic position and improved quality of life. Pathways to Self-Sufficiency (PSS) is another way DTA tries to assist its clients. PSS is an assessment tool meant to facilitate positive client engagement and targeted supports that lead to employment, career pathways and long-term economic stability. PSS is designed to identify clients' strengths and employment challenges, and to help our clients on their path toward economic mobility. The key elements include:

- a method of identifying where clients' workplace skills are strongest and where challenges may be preventing them reaching economic self-sufficiency,
- referral procedures to help connect clients to the appropriate ESP activities and refer them to the appropriate agencies and/or DTA specialists
- a focus on helping exempt clients work to minimize their barriers to economic self-sufficiency to improve their family's overall quality of life.

The initiative also requires a pre-benefit job search period and an orientation.

Based on this assessment process, DTA is able to identify the key challenges that get in the way of obtaining gainful employment. These self-reported data support DTA case managers and our employment support providers in tailoring interventions to the specific needs of the client. Based on PSS data, DTA clients identify the following top challenges:

- Lack of employment-related skills and training;
- Lack of work experience;
- Limited literacy/math skills;
- Health Issue; and
- Homelessness.

The PSS assessment and engagement process has laid a critical foundation for the Department as we continue to identify and implement reforms, policy updates and new procedures that better support work and economic mobility for our clients. DTA is working to improve upon PSS and is conducting iterative rapid prototyping, called “road tests”, in pilot offices to find the best means of engaging clients in their own assessment and goal setting.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY SPECIALISTS

DTA’s Self Sufficiency Specialists (SSSs) provide intensive case management and support to TAFDC applicants and clients who have significant barriers to employment and additional road blocks to transitioning to self-sufficiency within the 24-month time limit for TAFDC. SSSs work with their clients to develop a Pathways to Self-Sufficiency Employment Development Plan (EDP) which includes education, training and employment goals as well as strategies to help with any challenges the client may have as s/he transitions toward self-sufficiency.

All young parents participating in the Department’s Young Parents Program (YPP) will be assigned to an SSS for case management services.

Other clients may receive the assistance of an SSS, including, in order of priority:

- teen parent heads of household, whether pregnant or parenting;
- young parents (pregnant and/or parenting heads of households under the age of 24); and
- residents of emergency assistance or domestic violence shelters.

In limited circumstances, SSSs may also assist other clients who have been identified as having significant challenges in moving toward self-sufficiency.

WORK PROGRAM EXEMPTIONS

State law allows for TAFDC recipients who meet certain criteria to be exempted from the work program requirement, including if:

- their youngest eligible child is less than two or who have any child who is less than three months;
- they have a verified disability;
- they are in their 33rd week of pregnancy and those in their third trimester of pregnancy
- who have a verified medical condition that prevents them from working;
- they are a teen parent attending school full time;
- they are over age sixty;
- they are caring for a disabled household member; or,
- they are non-parent relative caregivers.

Of the entire TAFDC caseload, 21,438 cases have adults who are exempt from the work program requirements. While these “exempt” recipients are not required to participate in the work program, they are encouraged to voluntarily participate in any of the ESP programs. As of

February 2019, approximately 15%, or 3,172, of those households are volunteering to work and participate in ESP programming despite their exemption.

CONCLUSION

This year, DTA has implemented many exciting changes to the TAFDC program that we believe will help families transition off TAFDC permanently. As we move forward, DTA will continue to improve our program to better meet the needs of individual families and engage those who are exempt from the work program requirement initiatives that support their economic mobility. As the Department continues to simplify program rules and provide more access to resources we expect to see fewer families returning to TAFDC once they have transitioned off TAFDC and started down their path to economic mobility.