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Dear Colleagues,

Fall has officially made its grand entrance! While like many I 'm not happy to say goodbye to the warm weather, I am looking forward to what the fall will bring. Regrettably, the change of season does not speed our economy's recovery, affect the continued growing need for our services or the increase demand on all of us. I wanted to take this opportunity to remind you all that your contributions are recognized and appreciated by Governor Patrick, Secretary Bigby and me. I also hear from client families how, without your help, they could not have coped with or managed a desperate situation in their families' lives.

Your work, while not always realized in words, is clearly demonstrated in the actions of our clients that were able to feed their families, buy clothes for the new school year and were able to work toward self-sufficiency. Each one of you plays an important role in our clients' experience at DTA, ensuring the right benefits get to the right people at the right time, in a welcoming and respectful atmosphere is a heroic effort. I thank you for your commitment and support to our clients and to our team at DTA.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Curley
Commissioner

Quality Corner

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This month we will review two errors. The first error was caused by an expense deduction that the client had terminated. The second error was an invalid denial.

Information Reported at Interim Report

This case was a household of three that included the client and two children ages 14 and 12. The case was certified as Annual Reporting (AR). The review month was the 9th month of the certification period, the third month after the Interim Report (IR). When the client submitted her IR, she reported that she no longer paid for dependent care expenses. This information reported on the IR was missed by both the case manager and the supervisor. As a result, the client continued to get a dependent care deduction which caused an overissuance error of \$55 for the review month.

What’s a Case Manager to Do?

One of the most successful tools in attaining and maintaining high payment accuracy is a good case review system. Case managers must carefully review the IR or any other recertification form to record and process changes as indicated. Quality Corner in *Transitions* for February 2008: *Keys to Preventing Errors* documents successful strategies for case managers and supervisors to help maintain high payment accuracy.

Late Denial

This case was a household of one. The client applied for SNAP benefits on February 22, 2012. On February 24, an appointment letter for a telephone interview was sent to the client with an interview date of March 5. The client missed the appointment and a NOMI was sent informing the client that the interview needed to be held by March 25 (the 30th day). The case was subsequently denied on May 8, 2012. Since the case was not denied by the 30th day, it is a negative error for QC purposes.

What’s a Case Manager to Do?

This case processing timeline was correct with the exception of the denial of the case occurring after the 30th day. Special care must be taken to prevent negative errors from occurring. Unless there is a pending denial issued for the case, all SNAP cases must be approved or denied by the 30th day. If the 30th day falls on a weekend or holiday, the official date of denial is the next working day. For more information on how to avoid negative errors, see Field Operations Memo 2008-59: *Negative Errors and Application Processing*.

Training Corner

Everything you need to know about student eligibility for SNAP benefits.

September is “going back to school” month and a good time to review student eligibility for SNAP benefits and how DTA defines a student and determines eligibility. To be considered a student, an individual must be between the ages of **18 and 49** and enrolled **at least half-time** in an institution of **post-secondary education***, a vocational or technical school at any level, a program that provides for completion of a secondary school diploma or the equivalent, or a school at any level for individuals with physical or mental disabilities.

* Post-secondary education – an institution that requires the completion of a secondary school diploma or the equivalent.

What are the eligibility requirements for students? (106 CMR 362.410)

Is the Client a Parent or Caretaker?
A single parent responsible for a child under age 12, <u>regardless of availability of child care</u> ; or
Caring for a child age 6 to 12 where adequate child care is not available to enable the student to attend both school and work 20 hours a week; or
Caring for a dependent child under the age of 6; or
Receiving TAFDC benefits

Is the Client Employed?
Working at least a 20 hours a week averaged monthly; or
Self-employed earning at least the federal minimum wage (as of 9/2012, \$7.25) multiplied by 20 hours; or
Participating in a federally or state-funded work study program

Other student eligibility requirements:

- Attending a Community College in Massachusetts and participating in certain Perkins program. (FO 2010-28)
 - √ Verified by completion of the Community College Enrollment Verification form (CCE-I) or documentation from the educational institution verifying student eligibility status.
- Be assigned to or placed in an institution of higher learning through: a program under Section 236 of the Trade Act of 1974; an employment and training program under the Food and Nutrition Act; or an employment and training program operated by a state or local government.
 - √ Verified by documentation from the educational institution verifying student eligibility status.

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Training Corner *(Continued from Page 3)*

What is the definition of student continuous enrollment?

The enrollment status of a student begins on the first day of the school term of the institution. Such enrollment continues through normal periods of class attendance, vacation and recess unless the student graduates, is suspended or expelled, drops out, or does not intend to register for the next normal school term (excluding summer school). (106 CMR 362.420)

What educational income is excluded?

The following educational loans, grants and scholarships are **excluded from calculations**:

106 CMR 363.230 (D)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(1) Any grant or scholarship to a student, the terms of which preclude its use to meet current living costs;</p> <p>(2) Any grant or loan to an undergraduate student for educational purposes made or insured under any program administered by the U.S. Secretary of Education;</p> <p>(3) Student financial assistance provided under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 or under the Bureau of Indian Affairs Education Assistance programs;</p> | <p>(4) Student financial assistance for attendance costs, such as, but not limited to, tuition, fees, equipment or books, under programs developed pursuant to the Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act;</p> <p>(5) Work-study income of undergraduate students under a federally assisted work-study program.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> use the Education Income and Expenses form (EDUC-1) or financial letter from the college to verify financial aid or education loans. Refer to (FO 2004-9)</p> |
|---|---|

Important: Students that do not meet these eligibility requirements are nonhousehold members and not eligible for SNAP. Their income and resources are **not** considered in determining the household's eligibility and benefit level. (106 CMR 361.230)

Diversity Quote

"Diversity has been written into the DNA of American life; any institution that lacks a rainbow array has come to seem diminished, if not diseased."

Joe Klein

From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

- Q. 1** We received an *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition* from the sibling of a deceased eighty-year-old. The application indicates that the decedent had a \$3,000 life insurance policy. The sibling who is now applying for the funeral benefit was named the beneficiary of this life insurance policy. Does this mean that the \$3,000 cash surrender value of this policy is a countable asset because it had been owned by the decedent?
- A. 1.** No. Although this life insurance policy was at one time owned by the decedent, the cash surrender value passed onto the beneficiary, upon the decedent's death. In this case, the beneficiary (the decedent's sibling) of the life insurance policy is a nonfinancially responsible relative. Therefore, the asset remains noncountable. If this decedent has no other available assets and the decedent's circumstances meet all of the other requirements at 106 CMR 705.700 and 106 CMR 705.710, then the full \$1,100 payment may be approved.
- Q. 2.** Which relatives are considered financially responsible when reviewing the application of a funeral or final disposition benefit?
- A. 2.** For the funeral and final disposition benefit, financially responsible relatives include any current spouse of the decedent as well as any parents of a deceased minor child.
- Q. 3.** I received an *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition* today. It was completed by one of our local funeral directors. The decedent is an EAEDC client in our TAO who was living with his spouse, prior to his death. The funeral director indicated in his application that the decedent is currently married. Is it appropriate to process this funeral director's application?
- A. 3.** No. In this situation, contact the funeral director and explain to him that the person completing the *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition* must be a spouse or next of kin, unless none is available. (This information is printed on the application.) Since the funeral director has already indicated in his application that the decedent was married, you can explain to him that he may contact the spouse and request that she complete the application.
- Q. 4.** A mother completed an *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition* because her son was recently murdered. Since there are special benefits for some victims of violent crimes, should I first refer her to these, before approving her application?

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From the Hotline *(Continued from page 5)*

A. 4. Yes. Your client suffered a serious loss and this experience is very traumatic for her and her family. You should explain to her that as the survivor of a violent crime victim, she has certain rights and may be eligible for certain services. This could include up to \$6,500 for funeral benefits, to the extent insurance or other funds do not cover her crime-related expenses. If it turns out that your client is unable to access these funds, or is only receiving a victim compensation benefit that is smaller than the funeral and final disposition benefit DTA provides, then remember to accurately process and complete her *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition*. If the victim compensation benefit is smaller than what DTA provides, then the amount of the victim compensation benefit is treated as a countable asset.

Further information about victim rights and services is available below:

<http://www.mass.gov/ago/docs/victim/victim-comp-app-updated.pdf>

Statewide Victim Assistance Programs

Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance

(617) 727-5200 • www.mass.gov/mova

NOTE: Funds received as a result of the Compensation to Victims of Violent Crimes Act are noncountable in the TAFDC Program, according to 106 CMR 204.250(FF), noncountable in the EAEDC Program according to 106 CMR 321.250(EE) and excluded in SNAP, according to 106 CMR 363.230(K).

Q. 5. The *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition* I received was completed by a funeral director. It indicates that his client's funeral and burial cost was \$4,000. Since this exceeds the \$3,500 limit, what language should I include in the NFL-9, *Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance Or Other Financial Services*?

A. 5. A State Letter will be issued in the near future regarding changes to the funeral and final disposition expenses. In the meantime, if you receive a request for payment that exceeds the new \$3,500 limit, include the language below in the denial letter.

Mass General Laws, Section 9 of 117A (EAEDC), 118 (TAFDC), 118A (SSI) along with this sentence: The total expense of the funeral and final disposition cannot exceed \$3,500.

Q. 6. When processing a funeral or final disposition application for a decedent who is not an active or pending TAFDC, EAEDC or SSP client at the time of death nor on FMCS as a former client who has since closed, may I skip over the Voter Registration questions on BEACON?

A. 6. Yes, you must skip the Voter Registration questions, in these cases only.

Operations Memos

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Voter Registration BEACON Changes: Additional Edits

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP

Operations Memo 2012-29B

The National Voter Registration Act requires the Department to provide voter registration services to all applicants and clients (hereafter referred to as clients). There are very specific requirements for clients of all programs during the application, reevaluation and recertification process as well as when clients report a change of address. Clients may register to vote either at the TAO or by using a mail-in form. For current voter registration procedures regarding filling out forms and when forms need to be filled out, see Operations Memo 2012-36.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise TAO staff that effective with BEACON Build 44.9 (scheduled for October 1, 2012), additional edits have been added to the voter registration page to help ensure that procedures are properly followed.

TAFDC - Clothing Allowance, September 2012

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2012-40

The Department will issue a nonrecurring clothing allowance of \$150 per eligible TAFDC client under the age of 19 for September 2012. This Operations Memo advises DTA staff about the clothing allowance.

TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP: Changes to the My Account Page (MAP) Client Portal and Provider Access to MAP Pilot Project

All

Operations Memo 2012-41

This Operations Memo announces changes in the information provided to clients on the My Account Page (MAP) client portal. It also describes the implementation of a pilot project that will allow the Social Security Administration (SSA) and certain Department contracted providers that assist our clients with application and recertification activities to have access to the MAP portal.



Operations Memos

TAFDC and EAEDC – 10-Day Pending Period Update

TAFDC and EAEDC

Operations Memo 2012-42

Operations Memo 2012-38 informed TAO staff that, when a closing is submitted for a cash case in which the client did not keep a redetermination appointment and there is an associated SNAP case - if the release date for the action has not passed, BEACON will attach the cash closing to the automated SNAP closing. Even if there are less than 10 days until the release date, the cash case will close and the client will not receive the 10-day pending period.

This Operations Memo advises TAO staff that, effective with BEACON Build 44.9, if a case closing is submitted for a cash case that did not keep a redetermination appointment and there are less than 10 days until the release date, BEACON will move the cash closing date to the next available closing date that gives the client the required 10-day notice.

TAFDC – Learnfare Mailing

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2012-43

The TAFDC Learnfare requirement states that children between the ages of 6 (or first grade, whichever occurs later) and 14 must attend school regularly. Verification of attendance must be obtained for a child (ren) of a nondisabled grantee who is between the ages of 6 and 14. To comply with Learnfare rules, a child may not have more than eight unexcused absences in each calendar quarter. (See 106 CMR 203.900 for more information.)

At the beginning of each school year, school information must be annotated in BEACON for all children entering first grade. To that end, a mailing has been scheduled for all TAFDC grantees who have a six-year-old child who has no school identified in BEACON. This Operations Memo advises TAO staff about the mailing to grantees, how to process the returned forms and how to address cases when forms are not returned.



Operations Memos

SNAP Cost-of-Living Changes

SNAP

Operations Memo 2012-44

The annual SNAP COLA was processed during the weekend of September 22, 2012. This is a mass change affecting the entire SNAP caseload. This recalculation impacts the household's monthly benefit for October.

The following elements of the COLA will change effective October 1, 2012.

- **Shelter Deduction** - The maximum shelter deduction (for households without an elderly or disabled member) **has increased to \$469.**
- **Standard Deduction** - **The Standard Deduction has increased for all Household Sizes**

AU Size	Old Standard Deduction	New Standard Deduction
1	147	149
2	147	149
3	147	149
4	155	160
5	181	187
AU size 6 or more	208	214

- **Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs)**
 - The Heating/Cooling SUA **has decreased to \$586;**
 - The Nonheating SUA **has decreased to \$360;**
 - The Phone SUA **has decreased to \$41;** and
 - The Bay State CAP SUA **has decreased to 586.**

Unchanged COLA Standards

- **Maximum Benefit Levels** - The maximum SNAP benefit levels for all household sizes remain unchanged.
- **Minimum Benefit Level** - The minimum benefit level for eligible one-and two-person households remains at **\$16.**
- **Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction** - The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at **\$143.**

Update to Eligibility Charts and Issuance Tables

All necessary updates will be made to the eligibility charts and issuance tables at the www.mass.gov/dta website by October 1, 2012.

FYIs

Change to the DCF Placement View in BEACON

As part of the single state audit, it was found that some cases had Department of Children and Families (DCF) matches that did not appear on Data Match Unit (DMU) mainframe match. These matches did appear in the DCF Placement (Case Manager) view on BEACON. To ensure that DMU receives all DCF matches, effective October 1st there will be an enhancement in how the DCF Match view looks in BEACON. The DMU mainframe match view information will take the place of the DCF Placement (Case Manager) view. Currently, DMU staff processes the DCF match (see Field Operations Memo 2010-1). However, case managers still have access to the view to address the match on their own if a client comes in for a review soon after the match is populated.

Effective October 1st, there will be two new tabs on the match view: “Match Information” and “Placement.” The Match Information tab has information currently seen on the DCF Placement (Case Manager) view plus additional information from DCF. Case managers will not have access to the Placement tab (a pop-up message will display if case managers try to view it). The message says: “You do not have sufficient security privileges to view Placement information.” Due to the confidential information on the Placement tab, access to this information has been restricted to Central Office staff only.

On the “Match Information” tab, the Daily Rate field will be prepopulated when the Type field is either: Adoption Subsidy or Guardianship Subsidy. This amount belongs to the person on the “Placement” tab. No action should be taken by DTA field staff on this information.

Fuel Assistance 2012

The Fuel Assistance Program begins accepting applications for fuel assistance on November 1, 2012. TAOs will receive a supply of fuel assistance brochures in October for clients who are interested in applying for fuel assistance and request information about how the program works. The brochure will also be available on our website at www.mass.gov/dta.

The Department will no longer be mailing income verification letters and fuel assistance brochures to clients. Clients can obtain income verification letters to submit with their fuel assistance application in the following ways:

- Clients may also use their “My Account Page” (MAP) screen of case information. For more information on how clients can access MAP, see Field Operations Memo 2010-6 and Operations Memo 2012-41.
- Clients may use the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) telephone number to request an income verification letter. The IVR telephone number is 1-877-DTA-BENE or 1-877-382-2363, and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clients will receive an income verification letter within five days at the mailing address identified in BEACON.

(Continued on page 11)

FYIs (Continued from page 10)

- Clients who come to the TAO requesting an income verification letter must receive a letter before leaving the TAO. Clients who telephone their case managers requesting an income verification letter should be directed to use the IVR telephone number or to access MAP to print out their case information.

Posters advertising the availability of income verification letters through the IVR telephone number and MAP were sent to TAOs in 2010. Contact Schrafft's if a new poster is needed in your office.

Globe Santa Fund for 2012

During the first week of September, active TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP clients who reside in the Globe Santa geographical area were sent the *Boston Globe Santa Holiday Gift Verification* notice. The notice lists the name, date of birth and gender of all children age 12 and under. It includes specific instructions for drafting letters to submit with the notice, and a checklist to ensure that all information is provided to accommodate the client's request. A second mailing will occur in early November for families who were approved for TAFDC, EAEDC or SNAP after the first mailing.

The notices were printed on green paper with a red Santa Claus watermark to assist the Globe in verifying the validity of the notices. TAO staff should encourage clients to use this notice, as it will help the Globe staff process the request.

Clients who did not receive or misplaced the *Boston Globe Santa Holiday Gift Verification* notice may contact their case manager to request another. For clients requesting a replacement, case managers should use the Globe Santa letter option, which is available from the Letter Request page in BEACON. The case manager should print the letter locally, date stamp it with the TAO date stamp, initial the letter and give it to the client making the request.

To ensure that only clients who live in eligible zip codes can receive a Globe Santa replacement letter, BEACON has been programmed to only allow the Globe Santa letter to be printed for a client living within one of the Globe Santa zip codes.

(Continued on Page 12)

FYIs (Continued from Page 11)**National Voter Registration Act Reminder**

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) requires the Department to provide voter registration services to all applicants and clients (hereafter referred to as clients). Clients may register to vote either at the TAO or by using a mail-in form. Voter registration services provided to our clients include:

- informing clients of the ability to register to vote at a TAO or by use of a mail-in form, if the client prefers;
- asking clients if they would like to register to vote at application, reevaluation, recertification and when they report address changes to a case manager;
- assisting clients with voter registration;
- distributing the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Voter Registration Option Form entitled *Declination Form* at all in-office applications, reevaluations, recertifications and when a client reports a change in his or her address during an interview;
- providing a Massachusetts Official Voter Registration Form to the client who wants to register or, if the client prefers, providing a Mail-In Voter Registration Form that a client may mail or hand-deliver to his or her city or town hall;
- giving the client a Mail-in Voter Registration Form if the client does not want to register, but does not fill out the Secretary of the Commonwealth's *Declination Form*;
- transmitting completed Massachusetts Official Voter Registration forms to the appropriate local election office within five days of the client's completion of the form;
- making voter registration forms available at TAO reception desks; and
- providing assistance in completing such forms.

Please refer to Operations Memo 2012-36 for more detailed instructions.

FYIs

Reminder for Domestic Violence Protocols

Case managers may be informed of domestic violence (DV) issues at any point during the application process and at any point thereafter. All clients at application, reevaluation and recertification must be told about the availability of DV services, including good cause waivers from certain TAFDC program requirements, regardless of whether they report to be a victim of DV. See 106 CMR 203.110 for more information.

When DV is acknowledged by a client or if a case manager feels that the safety of the client is in jeopardy, make a referral to the Domestic Violence Specialist who is assigned to your TAO. Domestic Violence Specialists assist in a variety of ways, including but not limited to:

- assisting any applicant or ongoing client who raises domestic violence issues and/or concerns and scheduling follow-up appointments;
- assessing the safety and trauma issues of the applicant or client; helping to develop a safety plan; and referring the family for services;
- assisting in completing the *Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence* form;
- explaining good cause for non-cooperation with child support enforcement and informing the case manager of any changes or new information; and
- assisting with a request for the Heightened Level of Security (HLS) Code H and with completion of the Heightened Level of Security Confirmation/Declination (HLS-I) form.

See Operations Memo 2010-35 for more information about the role of Domestic Violence Specialists.

DTA Online has a list available in the Field Operations tab/By Liaison section identifying the DV Specialists and the TAOs they cover.

Voter Registration for Homeless Individuals

Questions have arisen about clients who wish to register to vote but who have no address (they state they are living on the street or in a car). Clients who state they are homeless in these situations must be given a *Mail-In Voter Registration Form* to complete. They must use the map on this form to show where they reside. For other homeless clients living in a shelter or motel or with family or friends, DTA staff must follow the procedures in Operations Memo 2012-36.

TAO Meeting Notes