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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

Last month, I wrote to you about the value of **SERV** and the benefits of volunteering within our communities. This month, I'd like to encourage you to explore a different, but equally exciting opportunity available to all of us as DTA employees---training through our own DTA Training Unit or through the EOHHS Center for Staff Development. Both offer classes free-of-charge, and their long term value is immeasurable. In particular, the Management Certificate Program and the new Supervisor Certificate Program both provide practical lessons on how to become more effective on the job and build upon the wealth of managerial and supervisory experience evidenced in TAOs across the state.

Having recently returned from attending this year's Management Certificate Program (MCP) graduation ceremony at the State House, I had the pleasure of congratulating twelve of our own staff members who completed this rigorous nine-month Program. It was a proud moment for all of us in attendance: fellow Commissioners across the Secretariat, DTA's MCP graduates, their families and many supportive colleagues.

The MCP graduation ceremony itself was a source of pride for our Department, but we were even further distinguished when Maria DeBeradinis, the Assistant Director in Southbridge, received the Durland Award. This Award holds special significance for many who remember Jane Durland as a uniquely qualified and highly respected manager. As DTA's Commissioner, it is gratifying to know not only that an award has been created in her honor, but also that one of our own employees was chosen to receive the award. Maria's final project for MCP allowed Southbridge staff to substantially reduce the processing time for Food Stamp applications. Their accomplishment is just one example of the ways MCP graduates and their teams have gone on to further our mission and improve operations. Congratulations to all of our recent MCP graduates: Marilyn Alexander, Christine Boardman, Gail Clermont, Catherine Fallon, Anne Louise Glynn, Karen Sampson-Johnson, Kato Kajubi, Nancy King, Kristin Naugler, Mary Otiato, Lilian Romero and Theodore Szabo!

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From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

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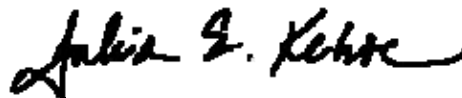
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Due to the success of MCP, the EOHHS Center for Staff Development recently began accepting their first applications for a similar program being offered to supervisors. The new EOHHS Supervisor Certificate Program (SCP) is open to all supervisors and is a four month program that will run each fall and spring. Applications for this Program are being accepted through August 22nd. To learn more, please visit the [SCP website](#).

Continued education is a critical element of professional development. Our Training Unit offers a wide selection of exceptional classes, and I hope you will periodically visit the PACE (the Commonwealth’s Performance and Career Enhancement Learning Management System) website for the most up-to-date course selections. From managing stress to managing spreadsheets, from learning Spanish to learning the Food Stamp updates, the Training Unit has a class to address your particular needs.

I hope you all enjoy the remainder of your summer. With September just around the corner, this is the perfect time to enroll in one of the many adult educational opportunities outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two cases with shelter errors caused by the incorrect use of the homeless shelter deduction.

Homeless Shelter Deduction

The first case consisted of an NPA family that was homeless in 2002 but moved into an apartment in 2003. When they moved in 2003, the case manager correctly changed the address for this family, but failed to deselect the homeless indicator on the *Address* window. Since 2003, the case had been handled by several case managers who closed, reopened and recertified the household during this time period. In fact, the case was recertified the same month it was selected for a Quality Control review. During the QC review, it was determined that the failure to change the homeless status, resulting in the continuation of the homeless shelter deduction, caused a significant overissuance.

The second case was similar to the first except it was a PA family. The address was changed when the client moved into her own apartment, but the homeless indicator was not deselected on the *Address* window. At the last recertification, the case manager received a Landlord Verification form that verified a rental amount of \$250 per month and the client's responsibility to pay for heat. Unfortunately, the

rent was entered into BEACON as \$25 monthly, resulting in a shelter deduction that calculated to less than the homeless shelter deduction. Since the case was still flagged as homeless, BEACON performed the comparison calculation and used the \$143 homeless shelter deduction. This actually lessened the severity of the error, but a significant underissuance still occurred.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Both of these errors lasted for an extended period of time because the homeless indicator was still checked even though the households were no longer homeless. There are two ways to tell if the household is still flagged as homeless and receiving the homeless shelter deduction. The first is to look at the *Address* window to see if the homeless indicator is checked. The second is to see if the shelter deduction amount in the Results section is \$143. Case managers and supervisors should review the calculation on the *Results* tab at every certification, recertification, reopening or whenever a change that affects the benefit amount is made. A \$143 shelter deduction should prompt the case manager to check the *Address* window and make corrections if the household is no longer homeless.

From the Forms File

New Form

09-160-0708-05

09-161-0708-05 (S)

FSA - Elderly (7/2008)

Simplified Food Stamp Application for Elderly Applicants

The Department has created the *Simplified Food Stamp Application for Elderly Applicants* form for use by applicants aged 60 or older. The form will help to streamline the application process for elders. See Field Operations Memo 2008-38 for details.

From the Hotline

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

This column focuses on food stamp benefits and medical expense deductions.

Q. A 74-year-old food stamp client sent me a copy of his bill for a hearing aid totaling \$504. The device is not covered by his health insurance. He explained that he has not yet paid the bill and he also stated that he has had no other medical expenses. Can I accept this bill as verification of my client's medical expenses, even though it has not yet been paid?

A. Yes. Even if your client has not yet paid for the hearing aid, it may be deducted as a medical expense. To deduct medical expenses, they need only to be incurred and not reimbursable by a third party.

Q. If my elder client presents his hearing aid bill of \$504, has no other medical expense and has 12 months left in his 24-month certification period, what is his monthly medical expense amount?

A. If your client has 12 months left in a 24-month certification period, then he has a choice. He can either:

- have the entire amount (\$504) deducted in one month; or
- divide the entire amount (\$504) over the remaining 12-month period.

If the client chooses to have the expense spread out over the next 12 months, then his monthly deduction amount is \$42. Since this \$42 amount is greater than the \$35 threshold, this client would be entitled to the cur-

rent \$90 standard medical deduction for the remaining months of his certification period.

In this case, **since applying the standard medical expense deduction results in more benefits over the remaining 12 months, the case manager should advise the client accordingly.**

Q. When verifying medical expense information, what is required?

A. Before approving an application, the amount of any allowable medical expenses as well as the amount of any third-party reimbursement must be verified.

At recertification, the amount of any allowable medical expenses, as well as the amount of any third party reimbursement must be verified *if the amount would result in a higher deduction.*

Other information related to medical expense deductions need be verified only when questionable.

For example, if a client drives to physical therapy and wants to deduct the round-trip travel costs as a medical expense, then a self-declaration stating the number and frequency of physical therapy appointments is adequate verification. (The round-trip mileage from the client's home to the appointment can be determined online with MapQuest.) Other details, such as the licensure of the practitioner, are unnecessary unless questionable.

For more information on medical expense deductions, refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-15 and 106 CMR 361.610(D), 106 CMR 364.400(C) and 106 CMR 366.320(C).

Field Operations Memos

CEO Special Match Unit: Case Closings Due to Failure to Verify for the IRS Match

All
Field Operations Memo 2008-21A
This Field Operations Memo:

- informs case managers about case closings initiated by the Special Match Unit due to the clients' failure to verify for the IRS Match;

- provides the correct closing reason if the client fails to submit verification(s) to the Special Match Unit;
- revises the Special Match Unit's responsibilities when the client submits acceptable or unacceptable verification(s); and
- provides instructions to case managers for responding to clients as a result of the case closings.

MassHealth: The Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) – Standardized Behavioral Health Screenings for MassHealth Members Under the Age of 21

All
Field Operations Memo 2008-31

The Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) is the result of the decision in the *Rosie D. et. al. v. Patrick* lawsuit. It is a joint collaboration between the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and MassHealth to implement the decision and to take additional steps to promote the behavioral health of MassHealth-enrolled children under the age of 21.

This memo:

- informs TAO staff about two MassHealth informational fact sheets that describe well-child visits, the required standardized behavioral-health screening tool, and current and future behavioral health services being developed through the CBHI for MassHealth-enrolled children under the age of 21; and
- provides instructions for case managers to encourage applicants and clients with children under the age of 21 to schedule and keep well-child visits and to avail themselves of the behavioral health services, if needed.

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Do you know...

Last month the Department sent a letter to all active TAFDC, EAEDC and NPA food stamp clients who have a child age 18 or under and live in a community participating in the Summer Food Service Program. The Summer Food Service Program is a federally funded program that provides free meals to children 18 and under when school is not in session. Meals are often provided in conjunction with educational and recreational activities.

The Department's letter lists the Summer Food Service Program sites available in the area covered by the client's ZIP code. The letter also encourages families to call Project Bread's toll-free number (1-800-645-8333) if they have questions, or go to www.meals4kids.org for more information. It's not too late for families to take advantage of this nutritional program.

Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 5)

NewMMIS – New MassHealth Cards: Returned Mail

All

Field Operations Memo 2008-36

Field Operations Memo 2008-29 informed TAO staff about the mailing of new MassHealth cards. Field Operations Memo 2008-36 transmits procedures for processing any of these cards that are returned in the mail.

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Regional Nonprofit (RNP) Referral Procedural Change

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-37

Field Operations Memo 2007-60:

- informed TAO staff about the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program;
- explained the benefits of the FSS Program; and
- advised case managers and full engagement workers (FEWs) of their roles.

Field Operations Memo 2008-37 provides revised procedures for making referrals to the regional nonprofit (RNP) housing agencies. These procedures mirror procedures for making referrals to public housing authorities (PHAs) detailed in Field Operations Memo 2008-30.

Diversity Quote

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

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Simplified Food Stamp Application for Elderly Applicants

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-38

The Department has created a new simplified food stamp application form for use by applicants aged 60 or older. It is fashioned after the regular food stamp application form, but adapted to reflect the general circumstances of elders.

The form helps to streamline the application process and removes a longstanding barrier for this population.

This Field Operations Memo:

- introduces the *Simplified Food Stamp Application for Elderly Applicants*; and
- issues procedures for processing applications using this form.

Vocational Specialists in TAOs Update

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-39

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff that due to budgetary constraints, the initiative to place vocational specialists in all TAOs statewide (detailed in Field Operations Memo 2008-12) has been suspended. The initiative will continue, however, in the following TAOs: Brockton, Dudley Square, Fall River, Holyoke, Lowell, New Bedford, Newmarket, North Shore, Revere, Springfield Liberty, Springfield State and Worcester.

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Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 6)

Federal Minimum Wage Increase

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-40

As of July 24, 2008, the federal minimum wage will increase to \$6.55. This memo explains the effect of this increase on Food Stamp Employment and Training (FS/ET) and Food Stamp Work Program (FS/WP) policy.

Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium Enhanced Services Program

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-41

Due to its success, the Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium is continuing to offer the Enhanced Services Program to our clients.

This program will help TAFDC clients, whether work program required or not, who would benefit from participating in skills training, job readiness and pre-and post-training job search programs begin the transition to work. The purpose of this memo is to inform case managers about:

- the Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium Enhanced Services Program; and
- how to enroll clients in this program.

State Letters

Standard Utility Allowances

FS

State Letter 1335

This State Letter transmits policy changes in the Food Stamp Program regarding an increase in the Heating/Cooling SUA to \$551 and an increase in the Bay State CAP SUA to \$320 that became effective February 1, 2008.

Medical Deductions

FS

State Letter 1336

This State Letter transmits the following policy changes and clarifications in the Food Stamp Program regarding medical deductions for elderly or disabled households receiving food stamp benefits:

- acceptable medical expenses are clarified;
- verification of medical expenses is required at application only, unless a reported change results in a higher benefit amount; and
- a \$90 standard deduction is applied when the monthly medical expenses are greater than \$35, up to \$125 per month. A deduction for actual medical expenses is allowed if the monthly medical expenses exceed \$125.

This policy became effective April 1, 2008. See Field Operations Memo 2008-15 for details on the food stamp standard medical deduction.

(Continued on page 8)

State Letters (Continued from page 7)

Food Stamp Work Program Exemption for Certain Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)

FS

State Letter 1337

This State Letter implements a waiver that exempts ABAWDs from the Food Stamp Work Program if they live in areas of the state designated as having limited job opportunities. The amended regulation also eliminates the Department's ability to exempt recipients because of lack of available community service sites. See Field Operations Memo 2008-33 for related procedures.

Dates to Remember

- **August 22** Application deadline for EOHHS Supervisor Certificate Program (SCP). To learn more, visit the [SCP website](#)
- **August 11 through 15** EOHHS Secretariat-Wide Blood Drive. To register, donate or volunteer, contact EOHHSgivesBlood@state.ma.us
- **August 11 and August 25** Commissioner Coffee Hours
Note: These sessions are full, but more will be scheduled.

FYIs

Changes to DTA Online

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

- An updated description now appears on DTA's Training Web Page, accessed through the **Training** side-bar option;
- The July 2008 issue of *Perspectives* has been included in the Newsletter listing under the **Diversity** side-bar option;
- A new Online Guide containing "An Important Message about Care for Children and Young Adults on MassHealth" has been added and is accessible through the **Policy Online** side-bar option;
- Field staff changes and telephone number updates have been made to the TAO and Liaison Listings located on the **Field Operations** tab; and
- DTA's new Mission Statement can be accessed through the **Our Organization** side-bar option. The new mission of the Department of Transitional Assistance is "to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life."

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FYIs (Continued from page 8)**Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Home Page**

This month, the EOHHS mass.gov DTA home page has been revised to include our updated mission statement. The new mission of the Department of Transitional Assistance is “to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life.”

Also, changes have been made to the “About the Department of Transitional Assistance” description and the Commissioner’s photograph has been added to her welcome message.

Federal Mileage Rate Increase

Food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 364.400 allow elderly and/or disabled household members to deduct medical expense in excess of \$35 per month. This includes “*the reasonable cost of transportation and lodging to obtain medical treatment or services.*” Expenses incurred for transportation to and from a dependent care site are also allowable as a dependent care deduction.

In recognition of the increased price of gasoline, a special adjustment has been made to the federal mileage rate. Effective immediately, TAO staff must use a rate of 58.5 cents per mile when calculating transportation cost that will be allowed as a medical or a dependent care deduction.

Learnfare Attendance, Probationary Status and Sanctions

Case managers are reminded that, while children under the age of 14 must attend school, cases may not be closed for failure to provide verification of excused absences. If a school reports to the Centralized Learnfare Unit (CLU) that a child has had more than eight unexcused absences in the previous school quarter, the client will be placed on probation. The client must be given the opportunity to provide verification that the child had acceptable reasons for missing school. If the client does not provide the verification, the client will remain on probation for six months or until the total number of unexcused absences during the six preceding months does not exceed 10 days, whichever period is longer.

When a client is in probationary status, school attendance information for the child will be reported monthly to the CLU. If the child has more than three unexcused absences during any probation month, and the client, after receiving notice, does not verify that the absences were excused, then the child will be sanctioned by the CLU for one month (two pay periods). If the sanctioned child is the only child receiving assistance, the client can remain eligible for himself or herself only, provided he or she meets all other eligibility requirements. The case must be closed only if the client is not in the grant and there are no other eligible children. In all situations where the CLU takes action on a case, the BEACON narrative is updated and an e-mail is sent to the local office director and/or Learnfare liaison.

For more information, please consult the *A User’s Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, pages XIII-K-8 through XIII-K-17 as well as the regulations at 106 CMR 203.900.

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FYIs (Continued from page 9)**NewMMIS**

NewMMIS was originally scheduled for deployment on September 29, 2008. However, this date has been changed. The new date of implementation is January 5, 2009. No revised schedule has been given for the mailing of the new MassHealth cards. You will be notified of the revised schedule once it is determined and will be kept informed of all updates to the implementation schedule.

Transitions Redesign

After many months of information gathering, careful consideration and extensive input from you our readers, the much anticipated, redesigned *Transitions* is here. Skimming the contents, you'll notice that, despite a fresh look, all of the columns many of us are accustomed to reading have been preserved. "Commissioner's Corner," "Quality Corner," "From the Forms File," "From the Hotline," "FYIs" and "Key Points" will continue to appear in the updated format.

A "TAO Meeting Notes" section has now been included to enhance your organization of new information, as well as a couple of additional features.

Workplace Violence Policy

On February 6, 2008 Commissioner Kehoe reissued the Department's policy memo on workplace violence. Included with this memo is the *Department of Transitional Assistance Incident Report*. It is important that all staff familiarize themselves with the information contained in the memo so that they may properly respond to incidents of violence in the workplace.

This memo can be accessed in DTA Online by clicking on "Administrative Memos."

Policy Hotline Telephone Number

To maintain the Policy Hotline's function as an intra-Departmental service, its telephone number will no longer appear in Field Operations Memos. Instead, the telephone number (617-348-8478) will be included with *Transitions* in the "From the Hotline" column.

Procedures for contacting the Policy Hotline remain the same and instructions for the TAO designee to contact the Policy Hotline with questions will continue to appear in all Field Operations Memos.

In reshaping *Transitions*, the design team wanted to maintain content integrity and at the same time create a user-friendly product that is easier on the eyes. You'll notice that all "products" (FYIs, Field Operations Memos, State Letters) are grouped together. We'd also like to begin inserting relevant photographs, including those submitted by TAO staff. After taking the time to review this newer version, let us know how it's working for you.

Send your comments and/or photos to the Policy Unit in the Division of Policy and Program Management. We hope you enjoy the debut of this redesign and look forward to your input!

TAO Meeting Notes