

Transitions

December 2005
Vol. XX No. 12



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

From the Hotline	2
Quality Corner	3
From the Forms File	4
Presumptive Eligibility in BEACON	4
2006 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS	5
FYI - BEACON Help Revisions	5
FYI - Changes to Policy Online	6

From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

As 2005 draws to a close, I'd like to highlight some of the year's many achievements. Overall, in working to help move people out of poverty, we've made significant advances. They include:

- A successful implementation of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Combined Application Project (Bay State CAP). By providing food stamps to more than 42,000 SSI households, *we have increased access and participation for some of the neediest individuals in Massachusetts.* In total, there are now 80,000 more recipients participating in the Food Stamp Program. Also, the Food Stamp Program was once again recognized by the federal government as a leader in the timely processing of food stamp applications. For this achievement, the program was awarded a USDA bonus of over \$1 million. Moreover, we were able to maintain low error rates while these accomplishments were being implemented.
- This same template for success is being applied to our Cash Assistance and Full Engagement (CAFE) Program. We are building a program that better prepares our clients for jobs. Through an assessment process built into our vocational rehabilitation program, as well as more customized training options (Adult Basic Education opportunities and Distance Learning), we have helped an increasing number of clients find work. During the first nine months of this year, local office staff and our contracted partners have assisted 10,785 individuals to enter employment. The CAFE Program has also achieved recognition from the federal government for our improved job-entry and job retention rates. Over \$3 million was awarded for improving the rate of unemployed TAFDC parents entering

Continued on Page 2

employment and over \$5 million was granted for helping parents keep their jobs. In addition, the Commonwealth received over \$500,000 from the federal government for improvement in the Family Formation and Stability category – a measure of the increase in the percentage of children in each state who reside in married couple families.

- In the area of Housing and Homeless Services, not only have we managed to maintain our “no motel” record, we have done so while implementing state legislative changes which increased eligibility for Emergency Assistance. Through the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development) and the Housing Assistance Program, *we’ve managed, in many instances, to prevent homelessness and shorten shelter stays.* By the end of this year, we anticipate spending \$2.75 million in Toolbox funds to directly assist families in retaining or securing housing. We have also reached the goal of 100 units committed by Local Housing Authorities for the Local Housing Authority Transitional Housing Program. Thirty families have graduated and are now lease holders in their own, affordable units. In addition, for our shelter and service provider partners, we’ve begun the deployment of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to help provide more timely statewide information on homeless individuals and families in Massachusetts, to give us a better understanding of our homeless population -- particularly those that are chronically homeless -- and identify gaps in services. HMIS deployment should be completed by the spring of 2006.

These accomplishments are the result of improved interagency collaboration, of coordination with our nonprofit partners and, most importantly, of the commitment of a superb staff. It is gratifying to look back and see all that we have achieved together.

We want to do all we can to ensure continued progress. For this reason, last month we hired 39 new case-carrying employees. As many of you know, this new group of employees follows the hiring of ten food stamp workers who came on board in July of this year. I’d like to welcome them all to our Agency. This is also a good time to extend a special thanks to our Training Unit for responding

From the Hotline

- Q.** Last month, I took an application from a man applying for TAFDC and food stamp benefits. He and his nine-year-old nephew were victims of Hurricane Katrina. I issued him emergency food stamp and cash benefits. He was also approved for ongoing TAFDC and food stamp benefits as he intends to remain in Massachusetts. At the time of the application, he couldn’t verify his relationship to his nephew. How long can he remain eligible for food stamp benefits and TAFDC without this verification?
- A.** Beginning in January, to continue receiving TAFDC, the uncle will need to have verified his relationship to his nephew. If he is having difficulty in obtaining original documents, assist your recipient by exploring alternate forms of verification. If he is having difficulty obtaining the birth certificates that demonstrate his relationship to his nephew, you can use other forms of verification. (Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-46(B) as well as 106 CMR 203.570 and 203.585 for more details.)

In the Food Stamp Program, the uncle would not need to verify relationship for continued eligibility. Refer to the "Parental Control" rule at 106 CMR 361.200(A)(2) for more details.

Q. Is the Voluntary Authorization to Release Information form available for TAFDC and EAEDC recipients?

A. Yes, this form is intended for TAFDC, EAEDC, FS and EA. To obtain verification that may rely on a consultation with a third party, the Voluntary Authorization to Release Information form should be used first (available in Policy Online Forms). Refer to 106 CMR 702.311 and 702.340 for more information.

Note: Collateral contact must be documented on the BEACON Narratives Tab and in the AU record. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-49 for further details.

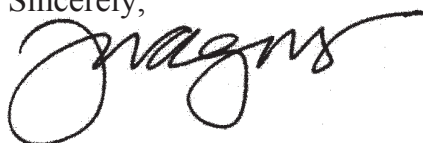
Q. A man came into our office to apply for EAEDC as well as food stamp benefits. He recently lost

quickly and working closely with these new colleagues so that they're better prepared to carry a full caseload. During 2005, the Training Unit has also provided HMIS instruction to over 400 housing and shelter providers.

Before signing off for the year, I'd like to share one last point. I realize that it's not always easy to notice breakthroughs in your day-to-day work. That's why this end-of-the-year recap is so important. It shows just how effective we've all been over the past 12 months. I'm certain that with the right blend of energy, inspiration and pragmatism, we can have an even larger impact in 2006.

Best wishes to you all this holiday season.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review two NPA errors, one related to shelter and the other to the child care deduction. Remember: Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) provides considerable protection from Quality Control errors, but only if the certification is done correctly.

Shelter Error

On the USR Form for February 2005, the recipient reported her rent as \$525. On the subsidy question, she reported that she paid \$91 and the housing authority paid the remainder. The AU Manager apparently failed to notice this detail in the recipient's answer. Consequently, the recipient's rent was incorrectly entered onto the Shelter Expenses window as \$525. At the previous recertification, the recipient submitted a Tenant Profile from the housing authority. This clearly showed that the recipient's portion of the rent was \$91. In fact, the recipient had been paying this rental amount for some time. Quality Control verified that the shelter expenses for this AU had not changed, resulting in an overissuance.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

Prior to the certification interview, the AU Manager must be diligent in reviewing the application or recertification form, previous AU record information, and related BEACON screens before making changes. In general, it is also good to review mail-in applications prior to the interview so that any confusing or conflicting information may be resolved during the interview.

Child Care Deduction

This recipient was also on USR and recertified as of March 14, 2005. She has two children for whom she paid child care expenses - a weekly amount of \$27.50 for the first child and \$13.75 for the second, according to a child care agreement dated November 2004. The AU Manager totaled the amounts for both children (a monthly figure of \$178.74) and entered the calculated amount onto BEACON under the name of the first child.

A month later, for some unknown reason, the AU Manager entered the same amount (\$178.74) onto BEACON under the name of the second child. BEACON totaled the two amounts and, since it was higher than the allowable limit of \$375 for this particular AU, the AU was given the \$350 child care deduction in the FS calculation. Quality Control verified that the child care expenses had not changed for either child.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

The AU Manager should have entered the child care expenses under the specific child for whom each expense was paid. For child one, the amount should have been ($\$27.50 \times 4.333$) \$119.16. For child two, the amount should have been ($\$13.75 \times 4.333$) \$59.58. If the AU Manager had entered the information onto the Dependent Care Expenses window under each child, it is unlikely that the child care expenses would have been mistakenly doubled. It is also critical a child care expense be attributed to the child for whom it is paid, since BEACON is programmed to recognize allowable thresholds based on the age of the child.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

From the Forms File

Revised Brochure

02-210-1105-05
02-213-1105-05(S)
TAFDC-PB (Rev. 11/2005)
Transitional Aid to Families
with Dependent Children
Program

The Child Support section of the TAFDC Program Brochure has been revised to reflect a recent policy change regarding noncooperation with the Department of Revenue (DOR).

Presumptive Eligibility in BEACON

EA
FO Memo 2005-38A

Presumptive eligibility information for EA AUs was included in BEACON with Increment 2.1.17. The purpose of this memo is to instruct TAO staff on:

- Locating the EA Presumptive AUs in BEACON by using the Views and AU Composition Results window;
- Identifying an eligible EA AU as presumptive on the AU Composition Results window;
- Changing the verification value for an EA Presumptive AU. A new value of

“EA Presumptive” has been added to the acceptable verification list as a verification to select; and

- Changing the default setting of the Reevaluation End Date which is 30 days from the EA application date. This date must be changed if actual shelter placement does not occur on the application date.

Housing and Homeless Services provided MIS with the names of all EA AUs that have or had “presumptive eligibility” between 8/22/05 to 10/28/05. On 10/30/05, MIS set the indicator to “Yes” for these EA AUs to read “EA–Presumptive.” For those EA AUs that had an exit shelter date before the increment, MIS then changed the “Yes” indicator to “EA-Presumptive: No”; therefore no further action is required by the AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator.

A list of all EA AUs currently identified as “EA-Presumptive” was faxed to each TAO for AU Managers or Homeless Coordinators to review and ensure that the EA AUs are accurately identified on BEACON. The annotated list was faxed to Central Office Field Operations.

2006 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS

TAFDC, EAEDC and FS
Field Operations Memo 2005-54

The Social Security and SSI Cost-Of-Living Adjustments (COLA) have been scheduled. Effective January 2006, Social Security benefits and SSI payments will increase by 4.1 percent. The basic Medicare Part B premium will increase from \$78.20 to \$88.50 per month.

This Field Operations Memo identifies:

- general BEACON activities for processing the 2006 Social Security/SSI COLA; and
- AU Manager and Supervisor activities required to prepare for the 2006 Social Security/SSI COLA.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been updated.

The list reflects updates made to both the primary and secondary windows.

Child Care Authorization

- Fields & Buttons
- Child Care Authorization Child Care Tab
- Create a New or Modify an Existing Child Care Authorization (“How To”)
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Education

- Fields & Buttons
- Education Tab
- Update Education Information (“How To”)

Employer Details

- Fields & Buttons
- Add or Update Employer Information (“How To”)
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Employment Status

- Fields & Buttons
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Employment Status Earnings Tab

- Fields & Buttons
- Change a Particular Gross Income Amount (“How To”)
- Enter Garnished Earnings Information (“How To”)
- Use the Employment Status Earnings Tab (“How To”)

Employment Status Employed Tab

- Fields & Buttons
- Enter New or Changed Income Employment Information for an Assessed Person (“How To”)
- Use the Employment Status Employed Tab (“How To”)

ESP Activity Disposition

- Fields & Buttons

Payments

- Fields & Buttons
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Glossary Terms

- ABE
- Caret
- CCR&R
- Child Care
- Deemors
- DOR
- DSS
- DYS
- EDP
- FSP
- Garnishment/Garnish
- Good Cause
- IRS
- Metasection
- Monthly Reporting/Monthly Reporter
- PES
- Prospective Amount/Prospective Income
- SAP
- SJS
- SSI
- TCC

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

Online Forms

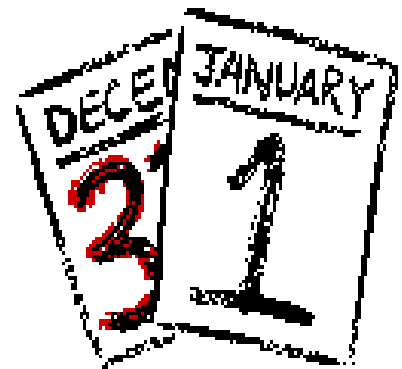
The following forms have been added to the list of Online Forms in English and Spanish:

Application for Housing Assistance Services

EA Self-Sufficiency Plan/Agreement – Phase 1

EA Six Month Transition Plan

“I would like to be known as a person who is concerned about freedom and equality and justice and prosperity for all people.”
Rosa Parks



his job providing child care for his cousin's child. The cousin was paying the applicant directly, and there is no unemployment compensation associated with this job. Now that he is claiming a disabling back problem, is he required to apply for Unemployment Compensation benefits?

- A. No, not in this applicant's situation. If you are aware of reasons why an applicant would not be entitled to Unemployment Compensation benefits, as in the situation you describe above, then the requirement is not applicable.

However, it's often in the applicant's best interest to seek out and apply for additional benefits. In both the EAEDC and TAFDC Programs, the development of other benefits is a requirement. If your applicant fails to follow-through with the Unemployment Compensation benefit application *when you know that he may be eligible for these benefits*, the EAEDC application must be denied. Refer to 106 CMR 702.700 for more details.

Note: The Food Stamp Program does not have this requirement.

Season's Greetings

from

Policy and

Program Management

