



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street . Boston MA 02111

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Field Operations Memo 2000-17
May 1, 2000

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From: Joyce Sampson, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: Massachusetts Food Stamp Program Access Review

Background

A random sample of Transitional Assistance Offices (TAO) was conducted by USDA in October 1999. The purpose of this review was to determine if barriers to program access exist and if the quality of services provided to applicants/recipients contributes to a national low participation rate.

USDA stated in the *Massachusetts Program Access Review* report that overall Massachusetts does a good job administering the Food Stamp Program. USDA has recommended corrective action in the following four areas:

- *Finding 1:* make food stamp program applications readily accessible to all potentially eligible assistance units or to anyone who requests an application.
 - *Finding 2:* do not deny a food stamp application before Day 30 if the AU fails to appear for a scheduled interview.
 - *Finding 3:* ensure that the expedited service questions on the Request for Assistance (RA-1) form are reviewed with the applicant. Answers to all three expedited service questions must be recorded on the RA-1 and the expedited service disposition must be documented on the RA-1.
 - *Finding 4:* display in a public area the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) nondiscrimination poster titled ***And Justice for All.***
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Purpose of Memo This Field Operations Memo discusses each of the four areas requiring corrective action and provides instructions for modifying Department practices where appropriate.

**Findings and
Recommendations**

IMPEDIMENTS TO PROGRAM ACCESS

Finding #1: TAOs must ensure that all applicants have the right to file an application the same day they contact the office. Federal regulations specify that: *the state agency shall make application forms readily accessible to potentially eligible households.*

Recommendation #1: All applicants must be advised and encouraged to file applications on the same day the AU contacts the Department in person, by telephone or in writing. The Request for Assistance (RA-1) form and the appropriate application form must be readily accessible. USDA has clarified that *readily accessible* means that application forms must be located at the reception desk or reception area in each TAO. See 106 CMR 361.100 et seq.

Finding #2: Federal regulations require that *if a household has failed to appear for a scheduled application interview and has made no subsequent contact with the state agency, the state agency must send a notice of denial on the 30th day following the date of application.*

Recommendation #2: AU managers must ensure that applications are not denied for failure to appear for an application interview before Day 30. See 106 CMR 361.700(B)(1).

CASE RECORD MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Finding #3: The RA-1 form must be fully completed. Federal regulations require that *the state agency's application procedures shall be designed to identify households eligible for expedited services at the time the household requests assistance.*

Recommendation #3: All NPA and PA AUs applying for food stamp benefits must be screened using the RA-1 on the application filing date to determine if the AU qualifies for expedited service. **The RA-1 must be completed in full for all NPA and PA applicants.**

**Findings and
Recommendations
(Continued)**

- The AU Manager must review the expedited criteria with the applicant on Day One to determine if the AU qualifies for expedited service. This review includes explaining the expedited service questions to the applicant and eliciting information from the applicant to determine if the expedited service criteria apply to the AU.
- The AU Manager must ensure that all three expedited service questions on the RA-1 are answered.
- **Finally, the AU Manager must record on the RA-1 the expedited service disposition (approved or denied).**

See Field Operations Memo 97-9 for application processing procedures.

NONDISCRIMINATION COMPLIANCE

***Finding #4:** Federal regulations require that all offices involved in the administration of the Food Stamp Program display the FNS designated nondiscrimination poster.*

***Recommendation #4:** All TAOs must display in a public area the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) nondiscrimination poster titled **And Justice for All**. TAO Directors must contact Judith Subanny, Director of Equal Opportunity, to obtain copies of this poster, if needed.*

Questions

Policy-related questions should be referred by your Hotline Designee to the Policy Hotline at (617) 348-8478. Systems-related questions should be referred to Customer Support Services at (617) 348-5290.
